



COMBAT

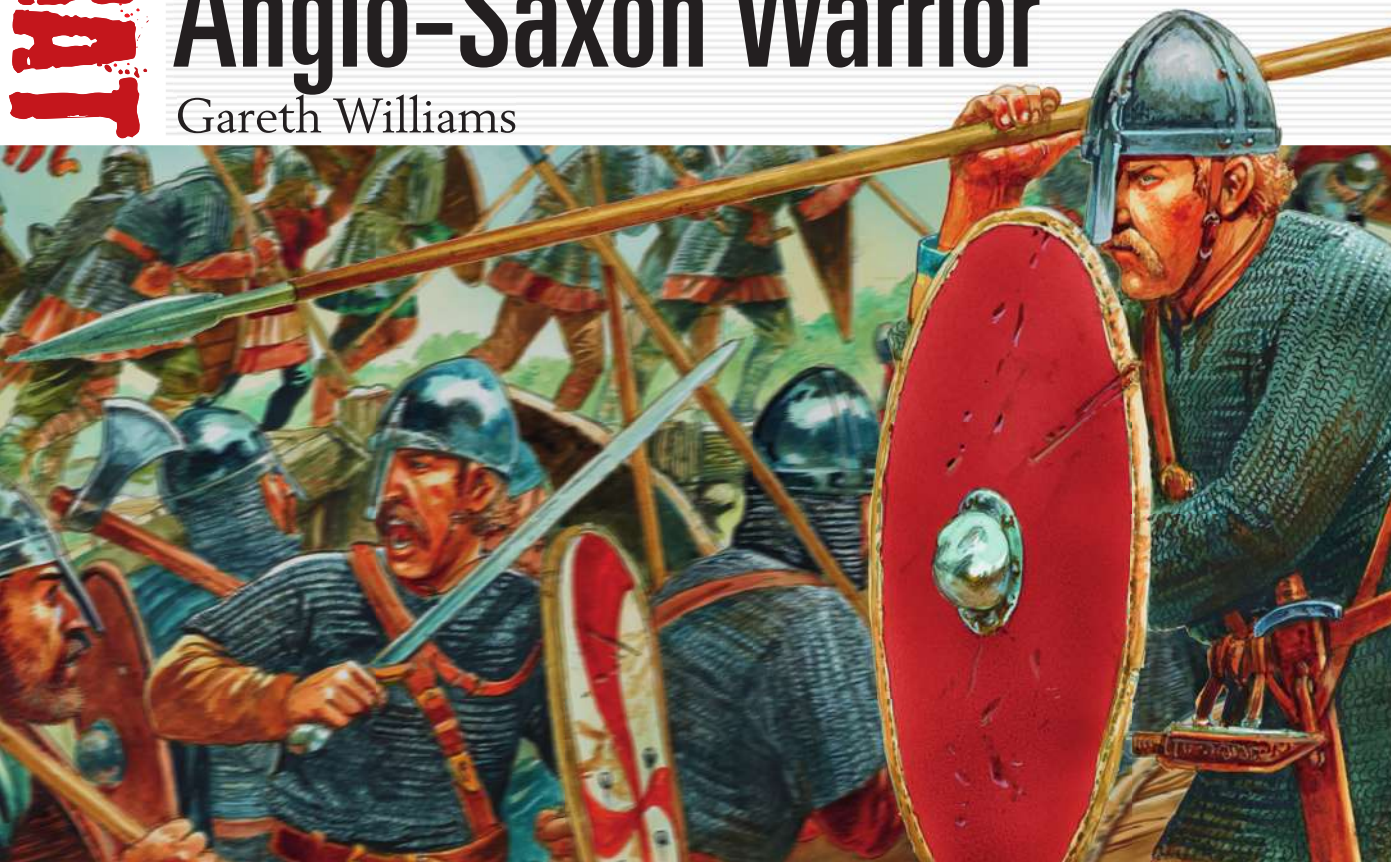
England 865–1066

Viking Warrior

VERSUS

Anglo-Saxon Warrior

Gareth Williams



England 865–1066

COMBAT Viking Warrior **VERSUS** Anglo-Saxon Warrior

Gareth Williams



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
THE OPPOSING SIDES	8
Mustering military forces • Leadership and organization • Mobility and logistics Objectives and strategies • On the battlefield	
ASHDOWN	30
8 January 871	
MALDON	42
10 or 11 August 991	
STAMFORD BRIDGE	56
25 September 1066	
ANALYSIS	71
AFTERMATH	75
BIBLIOGRAPHY	77
INDEX	80

Introduction

During the period 865 to 1066, England faced repeated attacks from Scandinavian seaborne warriors, generally known today as Vikings. Such attacks were not new. The Anglo-Saxons themselves had invaded the area and settled there in the 5th and 6th centuries, having travelled by sea from southern Scandinavia, northern Germany and parts of the Netherlands. At the time of their arrival, what is now England was divided into a number of British (i.e. Welsh-speaking) kingdoms, which to varying degrees retained some influences from the Roman Empire, the forces of which had been withdrawn from Britain in the early 5th century. The Anglo-Saxons conquered many of those kingdoms, establishing many of their own, including the important kingdoms of Mercia, Kent, Northumbria, the East Angles and the West Saxons. Although the term 'Anglo-Saxons' is used as a general term for these peoples today, it was only in the late 9th century, with the beginnings of the unification of England, that the idea of Anglo-Saxons was used to create a sense of common identity in the face of the Viking invaders.

The Anglo-Saxons were aware of their own origins, and these were consciously recalled in the famous description of one of the first recorded Viking raids, an attack on the coastal monastery of Lindisfarne (Holy Island) in Northumbria in 793, preserved in a letter of the Northumbrian churchman Alcuin responding to the event: 'Lo, it is nearly 350 years that we and our fathers have inhabited this most lovely land, and never before has such terror appeared in Britain as we have now suffered from a pagan race, nor was it thought that such an inroad from the sea could be made' (Whitelock 1955: 776). Around the same time, there was also a raid on the coast of Dorset, recorded in the series of annals known as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*:

In [King Beorhtric's] days came first 3 ships of Northmen from Hordaland: and then the reeve rode there and wanted to compel them to go to the king's town because he did not know what they were; and then they killed him. These were the first ships of the Danish men which sought out the land of the English race. (Swanton 1996: 55)

Other early raids are recorded in Northumbria; and although there are no surviving accounts of specific early raids in Kent, reference in Kentish charters in the 790s to military service against seaborne pagans indicates that the Vikings were raiding there as well. There are also records of early raids around the coasts of Scotland, Ireland, France and the Netherlands.

These raids came from both Denmark and Norway, but the sources are often unclear as to the origins of particular groups involved.

There was a recognized 'kingdom of the Danes', which probably at this point included most if not all of modern Denmark, together with parts of south-east Norway, southern Sweden and northern Germany, but the term 'Danes' was also used as a general term for all Scandinavians. Similarly the term 'Northmen' is sometimes used specifically to mean Norwegians, but again is more often used as a general term. Norway at the time was divided into several small kingdoms, and the 'kingdom of the Danes' may also have contained small sub-kingdoms, and most people would probably have identified with their own kingdoms and regions. These identities occasionally appear in the foreign sources that provide most of our information about Scandinavia, such as the *Westfaldingi* (people of Vestfold in Norway) who raided along the River Loire in France in 843, but more often they are described in a more general sense as Danes, Northmen, heathens, pagans, 'foul men' or even simply 'pirates'. These are the people that we know today as Vikings.

The word 'Viking' was not used as a general term for whole peoples at the time, but both the Old English *wicing* and Old Norse *vikingr* seem to have been used to mean 'pirate' or 'raider'. The difficulty of distinguishing the exact origins of different groups of Scandinavians in this period means that Viking has taken on a broader meaning in modern English, to cover all the peoples of Scandinavia in the period c.750–1100. With that sense, modern scholarship has noted the many more peaceful achievements of the Vikings, and that they were more than just raiders and warriors. For the purposes of this book, however, there is little distinction between the two meanings.

Early Viking raids were mostly carried out on a small scale, targeting coastal monasteries and trading centres in search of loot, and fleeing quickly before a defence or reprisals could be mounted. Both the size and frequency of such raids seem to have increased dramatically over time, and from the 830s onwards Anglo-Saxon, Irish and Frankish sources all report independently the presence of large Viking fleets in Britain, Ireland and western Europe. These fleets numbered hundreds of ships, and thousands of men. Instead of raiding



Part of an early medieval gravestone from the monastery of Lindisfarne (Holy Island), Northumbria. The warriors may represent Vikings, especially as the axe was a more common weapon among the Vikings than the Anglo-Saxons. (Photo by CM Dixon/Print Collector/Getty Images)

The Vikings in England, 865–1066

MAP KEY

The Viking *micel here* ('great raiding army') which arrived in England in 865 moved from kingdom to kingdom, over-wintering in a different place each year, but eventually settling across much of northern and eastern England. Following the defeat of part of the *micel here* at Edington in 878, Alfred of Wessex (r. 871–99) established a network of *burhs* (fortifications) across his kingdom, while the Viking settlers also established a series of fortified towns, each one probably representing the strong-point of the territory of a different force within the *micel*

here. Later Viking raids ranged over many different parts of England, but the areas of Viking settlement retained a distinct identity even after the unification of England under Edgar I 'the Peaceable' (r. 959–75), reinforcing the separate identities of the earlier Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. This sense of a separate identity in Northumbria in particular was one of the features that led Harald Hardrada (Hard-Counsel), king of Norway, to believe that he would gain support locally when he landed in Yorkshire in 1066.

Viking battle-axes and spears recovered from the River Thames at London Bridge, c.840–c.1020. The greatest difference between Anglo-Saxon and Viking weaponry is that the hand-axe appears to have been widely used by the Vikings as an alternative to the sword. (Photo by Museum of London/Heritage Images/Getty Images)

only seasonally and returning home, the Vikings began to over-winter in hostile territory, forcing temporary truces with the rulers of the surrounding area and resuming their raids early in the following year.

The Viking raids would see another escalation in England in 865, with the arrival of what the Anglo-Saxons called a *micel here*, or 'great raiding army'. This campaigned for years at a time, conquering and eventually settling the kingdoms of East Anglia and Northumbria, and a large part of the kingdom of Mercia. Only the kingdom of the West Saxons held out, but even their king Alfred (r. 871–99), later known as 'the Great', would be forced into hiding before re-emerging to inflict a decisive defeat on the Vikings.





The Opposing Sides

MUSTERING MILITARY FORCES

Anglo-Saxon

The Anglo-Saxon *fyrð* was the army raised at need in times of war. It was only rarely that Anglo-Saxon kings were able to maintain a standing army, although the permanent household troops of kings and nobles probably formed the core of the army at all periods. The word 'lord' in English derives from the Old English *hlaford*, or 'loaf giver', and thus a lord was someone who could afford to feed and maintain followers of his own. Kings and other great lords would maintain followings of young men, while more established warriors would be rewarded with lands of their own.

In addition to these personal followings, it was possible for kings to demand that landowners provide men at times of need. Military obligations first appear in the kingdom of Mercia during the mid-8th century in charters granting or confirming the ownership of land. Such charters often granted landowners exemption from various dues owed to the king, with the specific exceptions of service in the *fyrð*, and work on fortifications and bridges. Early charters do not specify the exact relationship between land and military service, but it is likely that then, as later, the amount of service due was in proportion to the total size of the landholding. Similar obligations can be seen in West Saxon charters from the 9th century, and continued after the West Saxon kingdom expanded in the 10th century to form the new kingdom of England.

A sense of the total scale of the forces available to the West Saxons can be seen from a text known today as the *Burghal Hidage*. This survives in two slightly different versions, and in its surviving form may date from the reign of Edward the Elder (r. 899–924), but its origins lie in reforms introduced by his father Alfred. In addition to the *fyrð*, Alfred ordered the construction

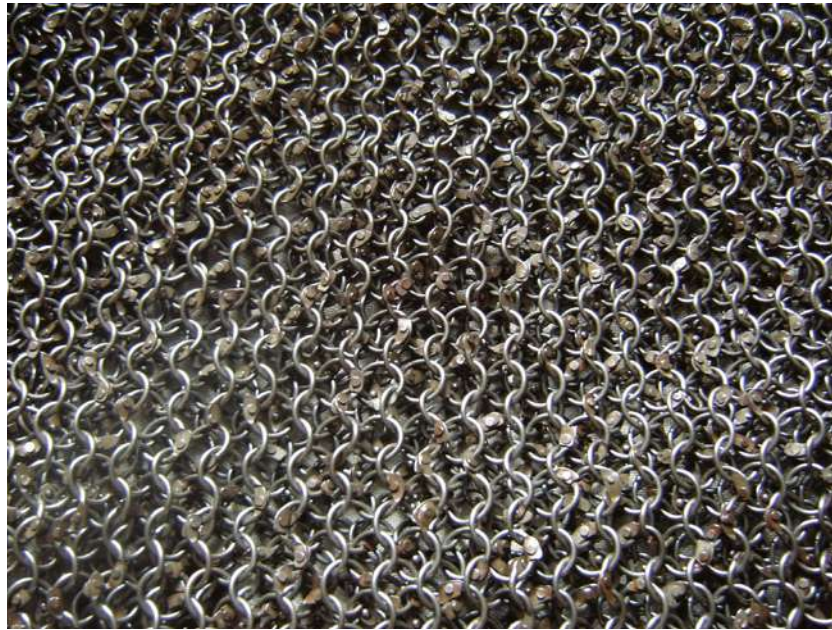


of a network of fortifications known as *burhs*. Each *burh* was to be supported by the surrounding area, and the necessary garrison was calculated in relation to the length of the walls or ramparts. This gave a total garrison for each fortification, and thus for the whole of Wessex, and the assessment of service was based on one man for each 'hide' of land, with one hide being the amount of land required to support one extended family. For example, Hastings in Sussex was assessed at 500 hides, nearby Lewes at 1,300, while the total number of men required to support the whole network of *burhs* was in excess of 32,000. This was said by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* to be in addition to the number of men serving in the *fyrð* itself.

Many of the *burhs* in the *Burghal Hidage* apparently fell out of military use as soon as the immediate Viking threat to Wessex receded in the early 10th century, and such a heavy level of military service seems never to have been demanded again. Domesday Book, compiled in 1086 but containing records of many of the dues owed to the king on the eve of the Norman Conquest in 1066, implies that a normal level of military service at that time was one man for each five hides of land. Charter evidence supports the presence of military service at that sort of level, although the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* refers to one man from every eight hides being required to serve in 1008. This system theoretically allowed small landowners with only one or two hides of land to band together to equip one warrior, but it also determined the total number of men to be provided by major landowners, including churches and nobles, some of whom owned hundreds of hides, and were therefore responsible for equipping and supplying substantial forces.

Defences of the *burh* (fortification) of Wallingford, Oxfordshire, built during the reign of Alfred the Great of Wessex. Like many defensive structures of the time, these consist of an earth rampart and ditch, but would have been strengthened by a wooden palisade on top of the rampart. Neither the Anglo-Saxons nor the Vikings regularly used siege weapons, so such defences could only be carried by assault. (Wallingford Burh to Borough Research Project)

Modern reconstruction of riveted mail. By the end of the period covered by this book, it is likely that all Anglo-Saxon warriors wore mail shirts, although the amount of metal involved and the intricacy of linking thousands of individual rings meant that these were expensive. Nevertheless, in 1008 it was ordered that every eight hides of land should provide a helmet and a mail shirt for the *fyrð*. This suggests that mail shirts were already a common element of military equipment, if not necessarily universal, by the time of Maldon in 991. There is no evidence that they were already so common in the 9th century, however, and it is likely that only the wealthier members of the *fyrð* would have had mail at Ashdown in 871, although others may have worn body armour of padded leather or linen. (Author's Collection)



Mail shirt from a 10th-century burial at Gjermundbu, Norway. Like the Anglo-Saxons, the Vikings relied on a combination of helmets, shields and mail for protection, although it is likely that mail only became relatively common in the later part of the period covered, and that access to mail for most Vikings was limited to looting from defeated enemies. There is also a small amount of evidence for the use of lamellar armour, made up of small metal plates laced together with thongs. All of the evidence for this comes from the Baltic, and there is no evidence that lamellar armour featured in Viking wars in Britain, although the possibility that it may have been worn by Swedish warriors in England cannot be excluded. (Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo; photograph: Ove Holst)



Viking

The extent to which Viking rulers were able to draw on anything like the Anglo-Saxon system of levying troops on the basis of landholding is uncertain. The word *leiðangr* in Old Norse seems to have had a similar meaning to *fyrð* in Old English, in that it was used to indicate a force directly under the control of the king. (Both words are translated into Latin as *expeditio*, indicating a mobile army.) *Leiðangr* also came to have a more specific meaning, indicating a levy of ships and men assembled from the population as a whole at royal command, primarily for the defence of the kingdom. Regional laws governing the way in which the *leiðangr* could be levied survive from Denmark, Norway and Sweden, but in their surviving forms the earliest laws date from the mid-12th century, and many are from much later. There is also considerable variation in the laws, but all provide mechanisms for the raising of warships and the men to crew them from defined areas of land.

How far these later law-codes can be projected back into the Viking Age is debatable. Later saga tradition attributes the introduction of *leiðangr* in Norway to King Håkon the Good in the mid-10th century, a ruler brought up at the court of Æthelstan II, king of England (r. 924/25–39), and who is said to have tried to introduce a number of changes in Norwegian society that are indicative of Anglo-Saxon influence. The details of the *leiðangr* system as described in the sagas are certainly anachronistic for the 10th century, not least the idea that Håkon was in a position to introduce a unified system across the whole of Norway, but the idea of some sort of royally controlled levy within the area of western Norway directly under Håkon's control is not in itself implausible.



The Viking mass grave – possibly an entire ship's crew – buried near Weymouth, Dorset, a few years before or after 1000. Even if a version of the *leiðangr* (a force directly under the control of the king) did exist in parts of Norway by the 10th century, the evidence of the later law-codes suggests that its purpose was primarily defensive, with the right to summon the *leiðangr* for warfare overseas representing a later development (certainly no earlier than the late 11th century) of royal power. On that basis it seems highly unlikely that systematic levies formed any part of the Viking fleets involved at Ashdown in 871 or even Maldon in 991. Even the forces of Svein Forkbeard, king of the Danes (r. 986–1014) and his son Cnut at the beginning of the 11th century seem to have been effectively large private war bands, recruited from anyone who would follow them. Isotope analysis suggests that even the garrisons of royal fortresses in Denmark around the time of Maldon may have been drawn at least partially from the southern Baltic rather than from Denmark itself, and the mass grave near Weymouth seems to tell a similar story. Rune stones from Sweden also suggest that the forces raiding England around that time were recruited from around Scandinavia, rather than being in any sense 'national' armies. (Oxford Archaeology)



This well-to-do and successful warrior is in his late thirties. He is physically fit from years of rowing and campaigning, but quite tired, as the previous few days had seen repeated battles and movement. Skeletal remains support the idea found in the later sagas that Viking raiding was typically an activity for young men, although there may have been a core of more experienced warriors in any larger force, and accounts of Viking forces campaigning for years at a time in the late 9th century suggest that many of those who joined such forces in their teens or early twenties might still have been active well into their thirties and beyond.



Weapons, dress and equipment

The disparate nature of Viking armies meant that until the 11th century there was probably little standardization of equipment. This warrior is striking a blow with a hand-axe (1), a weapon which is more typical of the Vikings than the Anglo-Saxons. His sword (2), an expensive item, connotes his high status. As a third weapon, he carries a *seax* (3), ideal for use at close quarters when there is no room to use a sword or axe effectively, or as a back-up weapon if his other weapons are lost or broken in combat.

The wearing of a mail shirt (4) would have been restricted to wealthier warriors, and those who had looted such items from

defeated enemies. His helmet (5) has a spectacle-shaped face-plate protecting the eyes and nose, and a mail aventail protecting the back of his neck; this added to the helmet's weight, but did not significantly limit vision. His shield (6) is leather-covered, with an additional leather rim sewn onto the boards. Together with the metal support struts on the back, this provides added support to stop the individual planks of the shield from springing apart under the force of repeated blows. Only the hand is protected with a metal boss. A strap allows the shield to be slung on the shoulder when not in use. The full pouch (7) at his side also suggests wealth.

RIGHT

Helmet from the 10th-century burial at Gjermundbu. Although pictorial evidence suggests that the conical helmet was the most common Viking type during the period covered, this helmet from a wealthy warrior's grave at Gjermundbu in Norway has a round crown, with a spectacle-shaped face-plate to protect the eyes, and a mail aventail to protect the back of the neck. This has similarities to pre-Viking helmets in both England and Scandinavia, and probably represents a style which was already old-fashioned by the time it was buried. Nevertheless, the Gjermundbu helmet has in recent years come to replace the horned helmet (which has no foundation in fact) as the standard representation of the 'typical' Viking helmet, probably because the more common conical helmet is difficult to distinguish from those used by other contemporaries. Nevertheless, both archaeological and pictorial evidence suggests that the conical helmet, whether with nasal guard or eye-guards, and whether in steel or leather, had become the dominant form by the 11th century. (Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo; photograph: Ove Holst)



The situation in 1066 was somewhat different. When Harald Hardrada (Hard-Counsel) invaded England he had been king of Norway for nearly 20 years. Later sagas make specific reference to his use of *leiðangr* levies both in Denmark and in his English invasion. Although these sources are not entirely reliable, this would be consistent with what we know of royal government in Norway at this time. By the time the surviving laws of *leiðangr* were written down in the 12th century, it had already been adapted to give the king the right to summon the *leiðangr* fleet for offensive as well as defensive warfare, although at a lower level of service. There is nothing inherently implausible about the idea that some kind of *leiðangr* may have existed in Norway in the mid- to late 11th century, however, even though its precise character and scale may well not be that of the later law-codes.

In Denmark, the first reference to the equivalent of the Norwegian *leiðangr* dates from 1085, when it was used in the context of a planned invasion of England, thus indicating that it certainly had an offensive function. The lack of any explanation in the surviving charter that mentions it suggests that it was already well established by this time. It therefore seems likely that levied troops formed part of Harald's force at Stamford Bridge in 1066, and perhaps even a substantial part, even if we have no evidence of precisely how such levies may have been raised.

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION

Anglo-Saxon

Senior command was normally closely linked with social rank. Kings and other adult royal males would be expected to command entire armies, or divisions of armies. Alfred, younger brother of Æthelred I of Wessex, commanded a semi-independent force under Æthelred I in the battles of 871 until his brother's death; Leofwine and Gyrth, younger brothers of Harold II, seem to have fulfilled similar functions in the battles of 1066; and Edmund Ironside, son of Æthelred II, commanded the English armies in his father's place in 1015–16.

The *fyrð* was organized on the basis of the shire, forerunner of the modern county, although in some cases boundaries have shifted since

FAR RIGHT

Modern reconstruction of the Gjermundbu helmet. The helmet is closely based on the original, but is more complete. (Author's Collection)

Anglo-Saxon times. The *ealdorman* was a royal officer, usually of noble blood, and served as the king's representative in civil matters as well as being a military commander within the shire. *Ealdormen* also typically led the forces of those shires until the reign of the Anglo-Danish king Cnut (r. 1016–35), when they were replaced by earls who governed larger territories. From the reign of Cnut, shires were grouped together both for military and administrative purposes into a small number of larger earldoms. Earls therefore controlled larger areas, and larger forces, than *ealdormen*, but their role was essentially the same. The combination of civil and military roles and the hereditary nature of both kingship and earldoms meant that command might therefore lie with young men with little military background and possibly no experience of leadership, though an element of military training would have been standard for young nobles.

Smaller units within the army would have been commanded by *thegns*. These were probably a mixture of established landed nobility who owed military service in return for being allowed to hold their family estates, and others who had been more recently rewarded for service to the king. Such service might again have been either civil or military, and again would not necessarily have involved much experience of combat, except during extended periods of warfare. *Thegns* were thus as close as Anglo-Saxon England came to a professional warrior class, and also formed the core of any army, but while many *thegns* at the battle of Ashdown in 871 probably had previous battle experience both in the preceding weeks and in some cases in the Viking wars of the previous 20 years, both Maldon in 991 and Stamford Bridge in 1066 followed periods of relative peace in which opportunities for combat experience were limited.

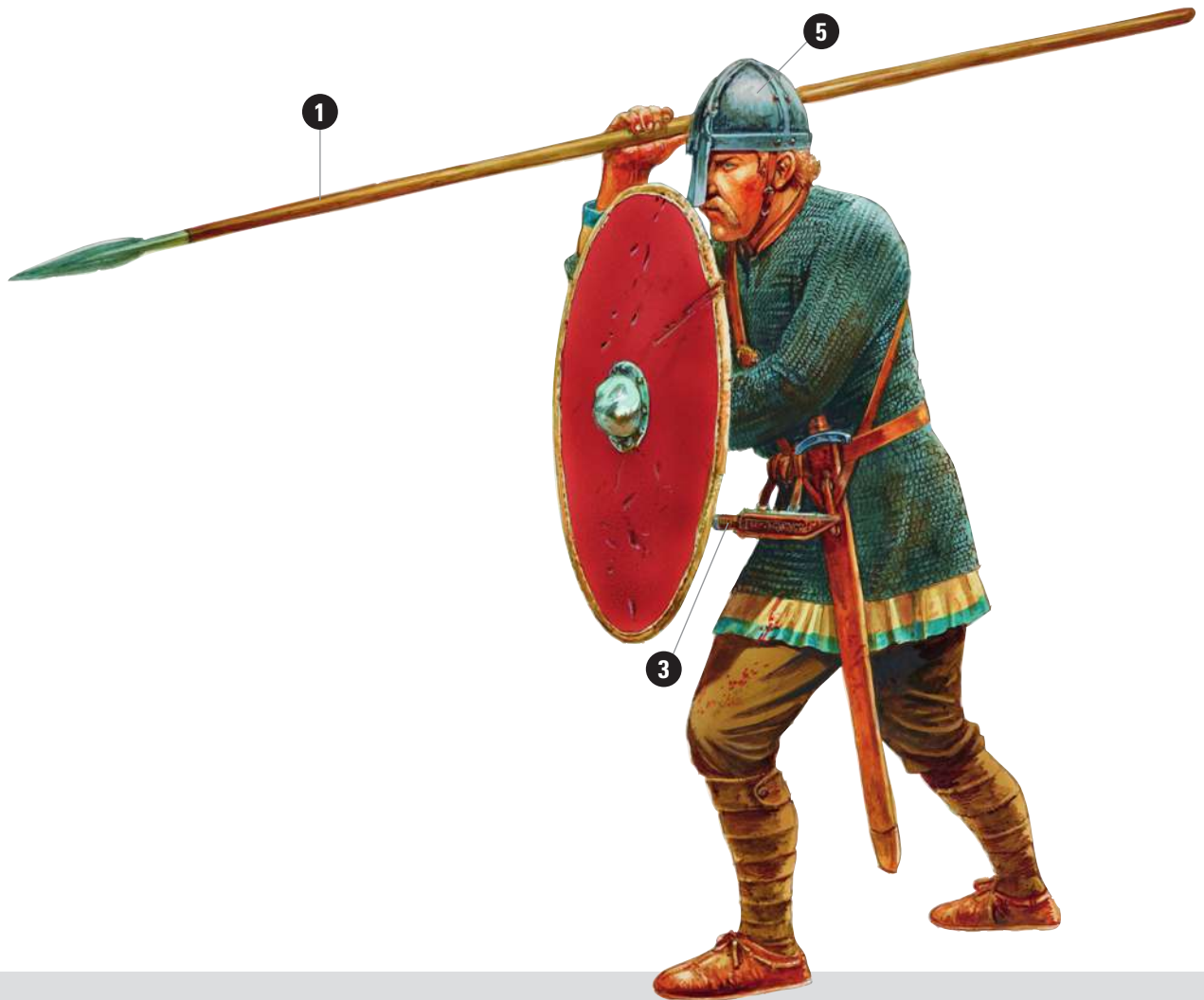
The personal followings of the *ealdorman* or earl would provide the core of each regional *fyrð*, together with the household troops of other major landowners, while the remainder would be levied on the basis of landholding, providing a mixture of professional troops and levies. It is unclear from the surviving evidence whether different troops were levied each time, or whether the same levies would serve each year. If the latter, they might well develop considerable experience of combat over time, despite not being full-time professionals, in the manner of militias and reservists in more modern times. The poem *The Battle of Maldon* suggests that the forces present on that occasion included personal followers of the commander, *Ealdorman* Byrhtnoth of Essex, together with other people of noble status, but also some men of more humble origins, perhaps representing levy troops. The historian C. Warren Hollister, writing in 1962, drew a distinction between the so-called 'select' and 'general' *fyrð*, in which the select *fyrð* were the professional core, and the general *fyrð* the non-professional levy. This distinction has been widely used by more recent commentators, but does not appear in the original sources. The distinction between professional and reservist may in many cases have been less clearly defined. Since five hides of land was the amount of land required for the legal status of *thegn*, a member of the warrior aristocracy, many of those serving in the *fyrð* on a five-hide assessment may actually have been *thegns*, and in some cases perhaps experienced warriors who had been granted land following service in the household of a lord.

An iron *seax* dating from the 10th century, recovered from the River Thames at Battersea, London. The *seax* was a fighting knife with the whole of one edge sharpened, but only the first few inches of the back edge, although there was considerable variation in the shape and size of the blade. It was often used as a secondary weapon which could be used as a back-up if other weapons were lost or broken, but its short length and sharp point made it ideal as a stabbing weapon in the close confines of the shield-wall, rather like the Roman *gladius*.
(© The Trustees of the British Museum)





This man, a minor *thegn*, is in his mid-twenties, with a few years of military service behind him. Possession of five hides of land was one of the criteria for a man to qualify for the status of *thegn*, so it is likely that the typical warrior was of noble status, although most probably held their land from greater landowners rather than directly from the king. While some members of the warrior class may simply have acquired their land and status through inheritance, others acquired it as a reward for service as young men in the household troops of the king or other great nobles. Such men provided the professional core of the Anglo-Saxon *fyrð*, and would have years of experience of military service.



Weapons, dress and equipment

The primary weapon of the Anglo-Saxon warrior is the spear (1), which could be used as a throwing or thrusting weapon. Different shapes of spearhead were optimal for the two purposes. In this case, the relatively heavy head suggests a spear designed primarily for thrusting, but it is slender enough that it could also be used for throwing, and from his current 'ready' stance the warrior could easily carry out either action. The combination of spear, sword (2) and *seax* (3) could be used by either an Anglo-Saxon or a Viking warrior, but the curved lower guard and lobed pommel of the sword hilt are more typically Anglo-Saxon than Viking.

The warrior is well armoured, with mail shirt (4), conical helmet (5) and round shield (6) offering good protection for his body, head and upper legs. Personal effects are carried in a small bag (7) at his

waist. This equipment is largely indistinguishable from that of a typical well-equipped Viking warrior, although the Vikings appear to have had greater variety in the forms of helmet used in this period. The overall level of equipment is higher than many members of the *fyrð* could afford, indicating that he is either a household warrior maintained by a lord, or a landed warrior in his own right. The total weight of this would be somewhere in the region of 30–35kg, depending on the length of the mail. While this was a significant weight to carry, padding under the mail and a belt at the waist meant that the weight was well distributed. The flexibility of the mail meant that it was not a major impediment to movement, and a physically fit warrior in mail could move from a prone position to upright in a couple of seconds.



ABOVE LEFT

Modern reconstruction of a conical leather helmet. Although early Anglo-Saxon helmets came in a variety of forms, the only Anglo-Saxon helmet type known in this period is the simple conical helmet with nasal guard. These helmets were certainly sometimes made in metal, but a helmet of the same shape made of leather boiled in beeswax also provided protection and was much lighter to wear and cheaper to produce. (Author's Collection)



ABOVE RIGHT

This carving from Sigtuna, Sweden, shows the head of a Viking warrior wearing a conical helmet. The nasal guard of the helmet is clearly depicted, while the rivets which would have held different plates of a real helmet together have become a decorative feature. (Photo by Ann Ronan Pictures/Print Collector/Getty Images)

A group known as *lithsmen* are recorded from the reign of Cnut to the middle of the reign of Edward the Confessor (r. 1042–66). The term comes from the Scandinavian word *lið*, indicating a military force. It often indicates a personal following, so *lithsmen* could simply represent an extension of the earlier concept of the household troops of kings and nobles. However, from the reign of Cnut the kings of England maintained a small permanent fleet, supported by an annual tax, until the fleet was disbanded in 1051. This coincides with the period in which *lithsmen* are recorded, and they are normally assumed to be the warriors who made up the crews of this fleet's vessels. As professional warriors, they still made up the core of the forces available to the king, but they probably represented a larger proportion of the *fyrð* than the personal households of the 9th and 10th centuries.

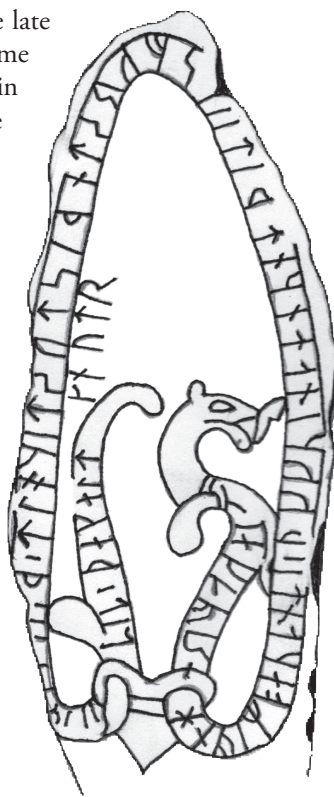
Sources of the 11th century make reference to *huscarls*, or 'house-followers', maintained by the king and earls. The appearance of *huscarls* in the sources largely replaced *lithsmen*. *Huscarls* also seem to represent a larger standing force than the earlier household troops, so it is likely that by the time of Stamford Bridge, while the bulk of the *fyrð* were still levies provided and outfitted by landowners, there was a larger core of full-time professional warriors than at the time of Ashdown or Maldon. *Huscarls* are often portrayed as highly trained and highly disciplined professional warriors, governed by strict internal rules, but this interpretation relies on a much later text known as the *Lex castrensis*, or 'Law of the Camp'. In its surviving form this was written by the Danish chronicler Sven Aggeson in the 1180s, and although according to Sven it describes the situation during the reign of Cnut, the fact that he was writing around 150 years after Cnut's death means that this claim is unreliable.

Viking

As with the Anglo-Saxons, we have little surviving evidence for the detail of command structures among the Vikings, nor for the underlying organization of Viking raiding armies. Greater leaders such as kings and *jarls* were expected to command as a reflection of their social ranks. The Old Norse term *jarl* is the same as the English term 'earl', but did not necessarily imply subordination to a king in the same way. Lesser chieftains might fight either among the companions of their lords, or as commanders of their own followings (in much the same way as their Anglo-Saxon counterparts), or with defined command roles within a larger army. The fact that Viking armies were often composite in nature meant that there would have been internal structures dictated by the shape of individual followings. We must presume that each of the wings at Ashdown had a commander, although one was led by two kings, and the other by 'many *jarls*', but we cannot say how that was arranged. A role could also change within the battle if someone was killed. Earl Tostig at Stamford Bridge appears in both English and Scandinavian sources as the commander of his own following, subordinate to Harald Hard-Counsel, but also apparently took command of the whole army after Harald was killed.

The idea of a lord supporting a household of warriors and rewarding them with gifts in return for military service appears in both Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian literature; but given that Viking leaders had fewer resources with which to reward personal followers than did the great Anglo-Saxon kings, it is likely that such followings were typically smaller than Anglo-Saxon royal households, and perhaps in some cases were limited to the crew of a single ship. That would suggest a figure of 40–50 men in

the late 9th century, but slightly more in the late 10th and 11th centuries, when warships became larger. However, powerful figures such as Svein Forkbeard, king of the Danes, who may have been one of the Viking leaders at Maldon, and Harald Hard-Counsel, king of Norway, who led the Viking army at Stamford Bridge, probably maintained several ships' crews themselves, while their leading chieftains would have had crews of their own, providing a substantial core for their forces. Individual leaders in the *micel here* probably had much smaller personal followings, but the *micel here* had multiple leaders, each of whom would have his own contingent, so even then personal followings would have amounted to a significant number of men. Even allowing only 40 followers for each of the two kings and five *jarls* mentioned by name in the Viking force at Ashdown gives nearly 300 men. As with the later invaders, it is likely that these leaders had more than one ship each, and more than a minimal crew for each ship.



Rune stone U 344 from Yttergärde (now at Orkesta, Sweden) referring to taking *geld* in England. In addition to those who were personally tied to the main leaders, there would have been many lesser chieftains, each with their own following. Some of these may have been linked by social ties to the great leaders, while others would have joined their forces with others in return for a share of any loot or tribute. This rune stone commemorates a man named Ulf, telling us that 'Ulf took three payments in England. That was the first that Tosti paid. Then Thorkell paid. Then Cnut paid.' The first leader to pay out the *geld* cannot now be identified with certainty, but the second is probably Thorkell the Tall, a Danish chieftain who for a time may have operated out of a base in Poland and raided England in the early 11th century, while Cnut conquered England in 1016, and went on to become king of England, Denmark and Norway. Ulf himself must have been a man of some status, but the rune stone does not make it clear whether he took service individually with the three named leaders, or was part of a crew who did so as a group. (Author's Collection)

Metal-detected finds from the Viking winter-camp at Torksey, Lincolnshire. Despite the use of the term 'brotherhood', the *micel here* would not have been exclusively made up of male warriors. Both Anglo-Saxon and Frankish sources in the late 9th century refer to Viking forces travelling along with their women and children, and recent finds from the site of the winter-camp of the *micel here* at Torksey indicate that traditionally female roles such as textile manufacture took place at the camp; and comparable sites in England and Ireland suggest the same picture. A mass grave at the Viking winter-camp at Repton in Derbyshire includes at least one female skeleton of apparently Scandinavian origin, and there are also female burials at the nearby Viking cemetery at Heath Wood. It has been argued that one of the Heath Wood cremation burials provides evidence for a female warrior, but the evidence itself is ambiguous. The extent to which women ever fought as warriors remains the subject of debate. It was certainly not common, but the evidence is insufficient to say that it never happened at all. As recently noted by Ben Raffield (2016), even if the women accompanying the *micel here* did not normally have military roles, they are likely to have contributed in some way to the defence of the fortified camps when they were under attack. (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge)



The idea of ships' crews functioning as units is also something that finds support in the sources. Runic inscriptions describe members of the same ship's crew as *fēlagi*, a term which gives us the modern word 'fellow' but which probably originally meant 'person holding property in common'. Depending on the context, it might also be translated either as 'shareholder' or 'comrade'. The term might be applied to a purely business partnership, and some of the references to *fēlagi* recorded in the sources may have been traders instead of or as well as warriors. However, the idea of a 'fellowship' of warriors is one that can be traced across many different periods and cultures. Living, training and fighting together, and sharing risks and experiences can imbue a strong sense of comradeship and shared identity, and recent studies have stressed the importance of combat in particular in developing a close bond between members of the same unit. Other runic inscriptions commemorate 'brothers' slain in battle, but it is not always clear from the context whether these were actual brothers by birth, or in some cases more metaphorical brothers-in-arms.

Rune stones also refer to *drengir*. The literal meaning of *dreng* is probably along the lines of 'young man', but references in runic inscriptions to *drengir* as comrades in war or trading expeditions or to an individual described as 'a

good *dreng*’ suggest that the word might have had some of the same ambiguity as the word ‘lad’ in modern English, with a sense of being ‘one of the lads’ as well as a more neutral term for a boy or young man.

The idea of some sort of brotherhood or fellowship also finds support in Frankish sources, and has parallels within formal military structures elsewhere, but also in less formal contexts, including pirates, street gangs, and a variety of counter-culture groups. As noted above, the word *vikingr* most often appears in the meaning of ‘pirate’ rather than ‘warrior’ and commentators such as the archaeologist Neil Price have suggested that the groups may have functioned in a manner similar to pirate fleets of the 18th century, with a strong common identity within each ship’s crew, but with individual crews also having a shared identity with other crews in the same fleet. As with modern gang culture, this shared identity might have been expressed through visible symbols. A type of shield boss with a hexagonal flange seems to be particular to Vikings raiding on the River Loire in France, and may be a distinctive feature of one of the Viking groups active in that area. Irish sources of the 9th century refer to different Viking groups as ‘Black Foreigners’ and ‘White Foreigners’ and while this has sometimes been interpreted as an ethnic distinction between Danes and Norwegians, current thinking suggests that narrowly ethnic distinctions between different Viking fleets were unlikely. It is more probable that such terms refer to some form of visual identity such as the colour of shields or banners, which would have the added value of helping to distinguish friend from foe in battles between different Viking groups.



Rune stones from Jelling, Denmark. The older of the two Jelling stones was raised by King Gorm the Old, king of Denmark c.936–c.958, in memory of his wife Thyra. The larger of the two stones was raised by Gorm’s son, Harald Bluetooth, in memory of his parents, and celebrating his own rule over Denmark and Norway, and his conversion of the Danes to Christianity. (Photo by DEA/G. DAGLI ORTI/DeAgostini/Getty Images)

MOBILITY AND LOGISTICS

Anglo-Saxon

Reflecting the relatively high status of most if not all warriors, there are numerous references to the Anglo-Saxons riding to war. In the late 9th century, for example, we are frequently told that the West Saxon *fyrð* 'rode' in pursuit of the Vikings. However, the horse seems primarily to have served for transportation rather than for use in battle, and the Anglo-Saxons should thus be seen as mounted infantry rather than cavalry. This is highlighted in *The Battle of Maldon*, in which *Ealdorman* Byrhtnoth of Essex had the horses sent away to the rear, to reduce the temptation for anyone to flee on horseback.

Cavalry was certainly used at least occasionally in early Anglo-Saxon England, before the period covered by this book, but it is less clear whether it was a feature of later Anglo-Saxon warfare. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* does record the use of cavalry in 1055 in battle against the Welsh, but this was a force under the command of Ralph of Mantes, earl of Hereford. Ralph was one of a number of Normans given land and status by Edward the Confessor, whose mother was Norman, and who had spent much of his life in exile in Normandy. Cavalry was very much part of the Norman tradition of warfare, and it would hardly be surprising if Norman leaders tried to introduce the style of warfare within their own commands that they were used to. However, the later chronicler John of Worcester tells us specifically that the use of cavalry by the English was unsuccessful on this occasion precisely because it was contrary to their custom. In any case, Ralph died in 1057, and most of Edward's Norman favourites had already been forced to flee the country in 1052, and there is no clear evidence of any further attempt to use cavalry before the Norman Conquest. Later Scandinavian sources state that the Anglo-Saxons used cavalry at Stamford Bridge, but this is not confirmed by any of the English sources, and most recent commentators have viewed this

either as an anachronism, or as a borrowing from an account of another battle.

Even without cavalry, as mounted infantry the Anglo-Saxons had considerable mobility off the battlefield. The West Saxon forces of the late 9th century seem to have been able to intercept and pursue their Viking counterparts on a regular basis, while Harold II was able to move an army from London to North Yorkshire in the space of a few days to meet the Vikings at Stamford Bridge.

Anglo-Saxon military service would have been for a limited amount of time, and included not just the provision of the

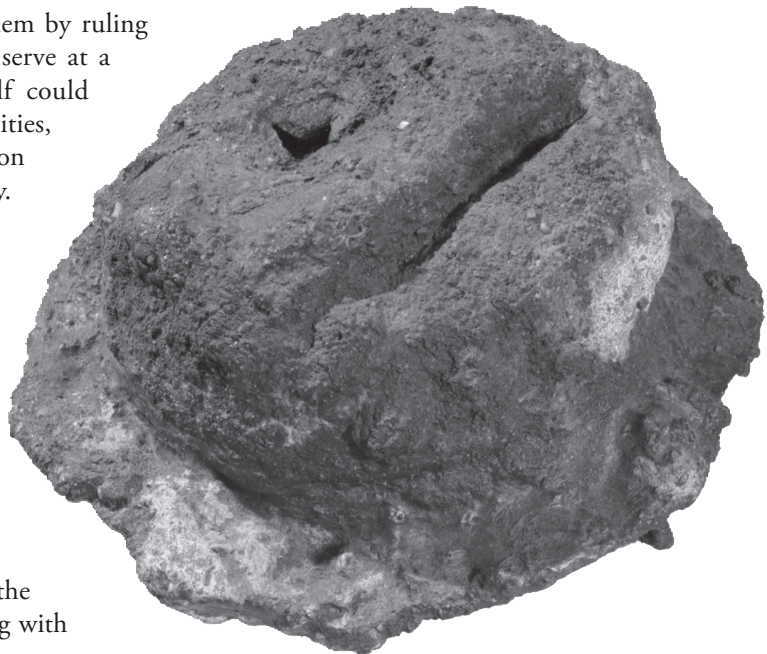
Modern reconstruction of a round shield. Round shields like this were typical throughout the period for both Anglo-Saxons and Vikings. They were made of wooden planks, with a central hand grip protected by a metal boss. The shield was often faced with leather or rawhide, with additional reinforcement around the rim, either sewn on or riveted into place. By the time of Stamford Bridge in 1066 the longer kite shield was also common among Anglo-Saxon forces, as it was across northern Europe. This has sometimes been interpreted as having been designed for cavalry use, primarily on the basis of the depictions of kite shields on the Bayeux Tapestry, but its main value seems to have been in infantry warfare, as it provided protection for the lower leg, which was left vulnerable by the round shield. Although the kite shield is often regarded as a Norman innovation, they are illustrated in a manuscript of the early 11th century produced at Canterbury, and can thus be safely assumed to have been in use in England by that date, and possibly a little earlier. (Author's Collection)





Shield from the Gokstad ship burial, Vestfold, Norway, buried c.910. The burial contained 32 shields for the crew of the ship, half painted in black and half in yellow, although the paint is no longer visible here. Tiny holes around the edges of some of the shields suggests that a leather or rawhide rim was sewn on to the shield for reinforcement. (Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo; photograph: Eirik Irgens Johnsen)

men themselves, but of their equipment and supplies. Limited service had the potential to cause massive problems, as the *fyrð* was forced to return home when supplies ran out, irrespective of whether or not this was convenient. Alfred of Wessex tried to get round this problem by ruling that half of the *fyrð* should serve at a time, so that the other half could protect their immediate localities, before relieving those already on service at the end of their duty. This did not always work in practice, however. In 893 a Viking force was besieged on Thorney Island on the River Colne, but the West Saxon army broke off the siege because 'they had completed their call-up and used up their food, and the king was on his way there [to relieve them] with the division that was campaigning with him' (Swanton 1996: 85–86).



Shield boss from Kaupang, Vestfold, Norway. The iron boss protected the hand holding the shield, which was the most immediately vulnerable part of the body if the shield was struck. The dent from a heavy blow (probably from a sword) is clearly visible. (Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo; photograph: Ove Holst)

Viking

The Vikings' ships gave them significant strategic and logistical mobility, both along coasts and up navigable rivers. While their open ships were more vulnerable to the weather than land armies were, they could cover greater distances in the course of a raiding season than a land-based Anglo-Saxon army. The *micel here* often seems to have divided into a 'land *here*' and a 'ship *here*', using fleets along rivers in support of their land forces. It is recorded that as part of the Vikings' terms for leaving East Anglia in peace they were supplied with horses, which enabled them to divide their force into a fast-moving mounted army while the supporting fleet could follow them on navigable rivers. Each year they moved to a different area, and often to a completely different kingdom, basing themselves each winter in or near a major royal

Carved stone from Tjängvide, Gotland, Sweden. As well as scenes from Scandinavian mythology, stones such as this example often carry images of ships. Contemporary images are important for our understanding of the rigging of Viking ships, as this seldom survives archaeologically. Ships on the Gotland stones are often recognizable as warships from the presence of helmeted figures and weapons. They may represent the achievements of the deceased in life as seaborne raiders, or some form of symbolic journey to the afterlife, or both at the same time. (Photo by: Universal History Archive/UIG via Getty Images)





estate or monastery. These sites were important less for the portable loot that they offered than because they offered winter supplies that had already been gathered, and further networks of supply which the *micel here* could exploit. The force which moved overland from East Anglia to Reading in 870, just before the battle of Ashdown, was probably reinforced by a fleet along the River Thames, and was joined by another fleet from overseas later in 871. The whole course of the battle of Maldon was dictated by the fact that the Vikings arrived by ship and could depart the same way if not brought to battle, while Harald Hard-Counsel in 1066 brought his fleet up the River Ouse as far as Riccall in Yorkshire to support his attack on York.

Like the Anglo-Saxons, the Vikings used horses for mobility. Horses offered greater carrying capacity and greater speed than travelling on foot, and considerably greater speed than baggage carts. The use of horses was an important aspect of the Vikings' ability to strike suddenly and catch the enemy unprepared, as occurred in their seizure of Reading, but was less of a feature when battles were fought immediately after landing, as at Maldon, or when in close proximity to the landing place, as at Stamford Bridge. In the latter case, there would have been no opportunity for the Vikings to acquire mounts for the whole army. There is also no firm evidence in the sources for the Vikings using horses in England for combat rather than transport. A number of Viking graves from southern Scandinavia include stirrups or other riding equipment together with weapons, and are sometimes referred to as 'cavalry graves', but it is not clear that this reflects anything more than the fact that a man of warrior status in the late Viking Age was also likely to be wealthy enough to own a horse.

Ship from Gokstad, Norway, built c.895 and buried c.910. The Gokstad ship is one of the best-preserved ships from the Viking Age. It had 32 oars, plus a single large steering oar in place of a rudder, and thus required a crew of 33, although there is room on the ship for slightly more, and a crew of around 40 seems likely. The Gokstad ship is broader in relation to its length than the true longships of the later Viking Age, which were built long and narrow for speed. The greater width of ships like the Gokstad ship meant that while they could be used in warfare, they had more space than later warships for supplies and equipment, loot or even cargo. (Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo)



Spearhead from Bjelbøle, Oppland, Norway. Spears could be used either as throwing weapons or as thrusting weapons, and could also be used effectively in the shield-wall. Surviving Anglo-Saxon and Viking spearheads include broad, heavy types designed for thrusting, and more slender types designed for throwing; and Old English poetry about warfare often refers to the flight of spears in battle, as in *The Battle of Maldon*. This suggests that many *fyrdmen* may have carried a light throwing spear for use at the beginning of the battle, and a thrusting spear for use in combat. The relatively small size and narrow shape of this example make it more suitable for throwing. The spear could be used effectively both in close and loose order. (Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo; photograph: Ove Holst)

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Early medieval warfare in western Europe tended to follow a pattern of seasonal campaigning, aimed at securing plunder, tribute or conquest depending on a combination of the attackers' military resources and ambition, and the ability of those attacked to mount effective resistance. Within Anglo-Saxon England, the bulk of the recorded battles and campaigns were between neighbouring kingdoms, and were therefore fought on territory familiar to both sides, with relatively short lines of supply. Campaigns over longer distances are recorded, however, and must have required greater logistical support, but any campaign which required supply beyond the capacity of the warriors themselves was limited by the need for slow-moving supply trains. The tendency towards seasonal warfare was dictated by limited logistical capacity as much as by the hardship of campaigning in winter.

The mid-9th century saw a fundamental change in Viking strategy in the years that led up to the battle of Ashdown. The scale of Viking forces increased to a level where it was often easier for their enemies to reach an accommodation with them than to meet them in battle, and so the Vikings began to over-winter in hostile territory, 'making peace' to secure tribute and supplies before moving on to new targets the following year. In 865, a *micel here* landed in East Anglia, and carried out this strategy of seasonal raiding interspersed with over-wintering for years on end.

The initial Anglo-Saxon response was largely reactive, simply mustering troops to meet the *micel here* in the field, or negotiating settlements when victory in battle seemed impossible or at best uncertain. It was not until after the more decisive Anglo-Saxon victory at Edington in 878, that Alfred had the time to develop a network of *burhs* which between them controlled all the main routes into and across Wessex, enabling the resupply of Alfred's armies while denying the same supplies to the Vikings. The West Saxon field army was also reformed, so that one part of the army was always in service, and the other part at home, meaning that as supplies ran out for the part of the army in service they would be replaced by fresh troops with fresh supplies.

This approach proved successful and it was extended under Alfred's successors as they gradually took control of the Viking-held territories of Mercia, East Anglia and Northumbria. As the unified kingdom expanded, however, defence in depth based around the *burhs* seems to have lapsed, probably because the cost of maintaining such a system was not sustainable across such a wide area. Rather than an abandonment of strategic defence, this probably meant a shift to a perimeter defence, with the establishment of fleets to guard the coasts of England; a number of written sources suggest the establishment across England in the 10th century of 'ship-sokes' – large areas within each of which the landholders were jointly responsible for the maintenance of a warship and its crew. The system certainly seems to have been in place under Edgar I 'the Peaceable' (r. 959–75). Under his successors, however, the strength of the coastal defence seems to have declined, and England was poorly prepared to face renewed large-scale Viking raiding in the 980s.

Although the overall resources and manpower available to Æthelred II (r. 978–1016) were much greater, the fragmented nature of the expanded kingdom made it harder to raise an equivalent force quickly enough to

respond to an immediate threat. In contrast, the Viking raiders maintained the same strategic mobility of earlier generations, enabling them to threaten at any point around England's long and exposed coastline, and to retreat quickly if significant opposition appeared. Like earlier phases of Viking activity, the Maldon campaign and the other raids of the time seem to have been based on a strategy of the threat of force, backed by real force if the threat alone proved insufficient. Whether or not the Vikings offered Sandwich in Kent and Ipswich in Suffolk the chance of peace in return for tribute is not recorded. As important trading towns, both with their own mints, they were similar to Maldon, and probably all three could have raised some sort of ransom payment. Even so, the knowledge of the sack of Sandwich and Ipswich, as well as of Byrhtnoth's defeat and death at Maldon, almost certainly contributed to the willingness of Æthelred II and his council to pay to protect London. History does not record whether London was always the main target, or whether the attackers simply followed the coastline opportunistically. Nevertheless, the possibility cannot be excluded that the first targets were deliberately sacked to increase the pressure on London to negotiate. The fact that the Viking fleet made its way to London in time to return home with tribute before the end of the sailing season may suggest that there was a coherent strategy for that campaigning season. The Anglo-Saxon strategy to counter this was simply to respond on a local level, and was ultimately unsuccessful.

The Viking strategy in 1066 was very different. Harald Hard-Counsel came at the head of a national army in pursuit of what could at least be argued to be a legitimate claim to the throne, if a weak one. Harald attacked in full knowledge that Harold II was in the south, preparing to meet Duke William II's invasion from Normandy. By landing in Yorkshire accompanied by Tostig, the former earl of Northumbria (1055–65) and brother of Harold II, Harald hoped to gain the voluntary submission of the northerners, many of whom were of mixed descent. On 20 September the English forces committed to the initial defence of the north, led by Morcar, who had succeeded Tostig as earl of Northumbria, and his brother Edwin, earl of Mercia, were crushed at Fulford, just outside York.

The fact that the battle of Stamford Bridge was fought only five days later indicates that Harold II was already well on his way to the north, and his initial strategy must have been to combine his forces with the northern army of Morcar and Edwin. They have often been blamed by historians for giving battle too early, but if they had not fought when they did it is likely that York would either have been captured by Harald Hard-Counsel or would have submitted to him before Harold II arrived. With the imminent threat of Duke William II of Normandy's arrival in the south, Harold II would not have been able to undertake a long siege of York without risking losing the south to William, and might even have made a peace granting Harald Hard-Counsel control of the north of England. A similar division had been made by Cnut and Edmund II Ironside in 1016, and was only avoided as a result of the latter's premature death shortly afterwards.

Had William's fleet not been delayed by storms, allowing Harold II to come north, Harald Hard-Counsel's strategy might even have been successful. Accounts of the battle of Stamford Bridge suggest, however, that Harold II



Silver penny of Æthelred II with characteristic Viking 'peck' marks. The coins were tested with the point of a knife to establish that they were good silver. The Viking fleet that arrived in 991 targeted towns which were either coastal or easily accessible on river estuaries. They first attacked the port of Sandwich in Kent, then Ipswich in Suffolk before arriving at Maldon in Essex, and subsequently moving up the River Thames to threaten London. Both Sandwich and Ipswich seem to have been sacked with little resistance, and Maldon was presumably also sacked following the defeat of the Anglo-Saxon forces under *Ealdorman* Byrhtnoth of Essex. The poem *The Battle of Maldon* clearly states that the Vikings demanded tribute in return for peace, and that Byrhtnoth refused to pay, but when the Viking fleet moved to threaten London they successfully demanded tribute of £10,000. This was followed by other payments to Viking fleets of unspecified amounts in 994 and 1002, £30,000 or £36,000 in 1007, and £8,000 or £48,000 in 1012. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

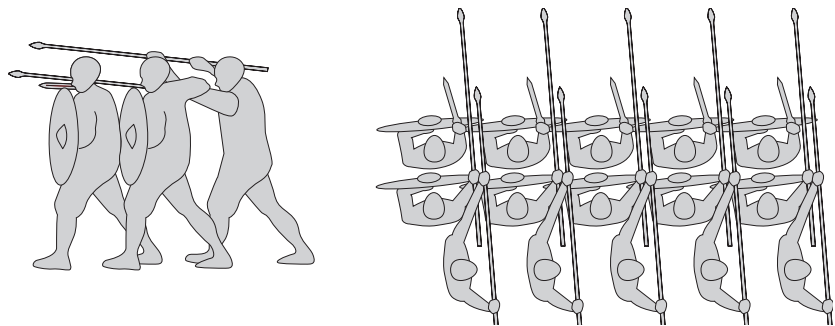
regained the strategic initiative by attacking as soon as he arrived in the York area, taking Harald by surprise, with the travel-weariness of his own men balanced both by the battle-weariness of Harald's men and by their lack of preparation.

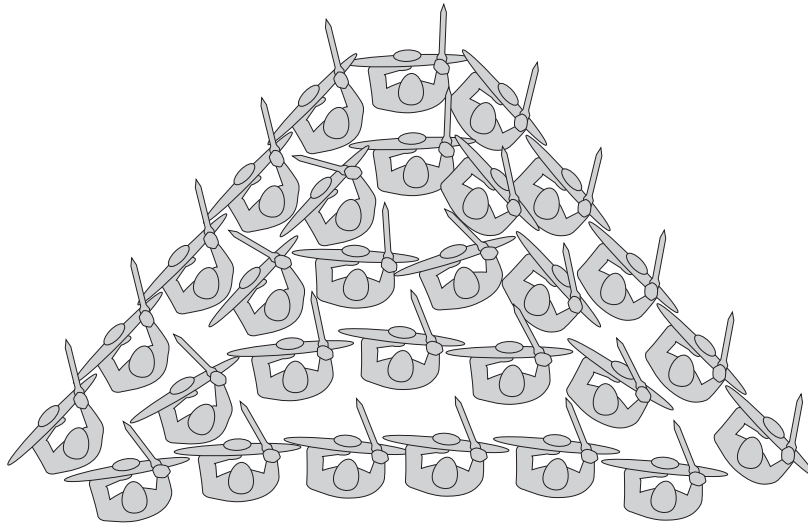
ON THE BATTLEFIELD

Mobility on the battlefield was limited to what could be achieved on foot, by relatively heavily armed men. A typical load for weapons, mail, padding, helmet and shield was probably in the region of 30–35kg. This is not a terribly heavy load by modern standards, although skeletal evidence suggests that average height was slightly lower in this period than today. One of the advantages of mail is that it is flexible, and not a major impediment to movement, and with the use of a belt its weight can be spread efficiently between the shoulders and waist. For physically fit men used to wearing mail, it would not therefore be a major barrier to mobility, but levy troops unfamiliar with mail might struggle more. Nevertheless, for professional warriors it would have been possible to charge on foot at some speed, at least when fresh, although fatigue would naturally become an issue in a prolonged battle, and the combination of mail and padding also posed potential difficulties with overheating. The added weight also made charging uphill markedly more difficult, which added to the importance of taking the higher ground at the beginning of a battle. The combination of helmet and mail would also tend to make warriors top-heavy, and given that all the surviving evidence for footwear in this period indicates that smooth leather soles were the norm, this would pose a severe risk of slipping if moving at speed on wet or muddy surfaces.

While the human voice may have served as a means for command in smaller skirmishes, it would have been of limited value in battles involving hundreds and even thousands of men, but there are no surviving accounts of how Anglo-Saxon and Viking leaders communicated their orders. Metal trumpets are not recorded in this period, but animal horns may well have been used to communicate standard signals in the same way as trumpets and bugles in other periods. Standards were also carried into battle close to the leader; raven banners seem to have been used by several Viking commanders, including Harald Hard-Counsel at Stamford Bridge, and it is possible, but unprovable, that these were used to signal as well as being symbols of authority. Finally, lightly armed or unarmed messengers may have been used to convey orders at speed on the

The shield-wall (Old Norse *skjaldborg*, Old English *scildweall* or *bordweall*) was used by both Anglo-Saxons and Vikings. In close order the overlapping shields meant that each warrior protected and was protected by his neighbour as well as himself, while pressure behind the shields meant that they could be used as a solid but flexible wall for pushing. The shield-wall in close order left little room to wield swords and axes effectively, however, although the shorter *seax* could be used effectively for thrusting through the gaps. The rear ranks could also use spears to thrust through the gaps, as well as using shields more flexibly to defend against missile weapons. Accounts of the battle of Stamford Bridge indicate that the shield-wall could be formed as a defensive circle, rather than just a straight line, providing defence against attack from any direction in the same way as a later infantry square.





The boar's-snout formation is a variant of the shield-wall, with the front rank bent back on either side to form a wedge with overlapping shields on both sides, and the centre filled with additional ranks of men. Advancing at speed, it was used to break through an enemy shield-wall. Said to have been invented by the god Odin, the boar's snout is not recorded in contemporary sources, and may be a later literary invention. Similar formations are recorded in late Roman sources, however, and it may have been a perfectly genuine formation of the period.

battlefield. The fact that the Anglo-Saxons often rode to battle, even if they typically fought on foot, means that the possibility of mounted messengers cannot be discounted (Harald Hard-Counsel is said to have sent three riders for speed when summoning reinforcements for the fighting at Stamford Bridge), but all of these possibilities are based on speculation rather than established fact.

Because there are so few detailed accounts of battles from this period, we know little of either Anglo-Saxon or Viking battle tactics, and what little we do know suggests that the two were very similar, although as we have seen there were greater differences at the strategic level. Those references that we do have suggest that the shield-wall was the most common tactical formation for both sides. This was apparently used at Ashdown, and shortly afterwards at *Meretun* (possibly Marten in Wiltshire) and also appears in accounts of the battles at Maldon and Stamford Bridge. Sources from after the Viking Age suggest that the Vikings may also have used a formation known as the 'boar's snout' or 'wedge'. Alfred's biographer Asser, in his account of the battle of Ashdown, indicates that Alfred attacked the Vikings 'like a wild boar' (Keynes & Lapidge 1983: 79), which could conceivably be taken to refer to the boar's-snout formation, especially given Alfred's apparent success in breaking the Viking line, but the fact that Asser uses similar descriptions elsewhere, drawing comparisons with the fox and the wolf, suggests that the term is being used figuratively to indicate the speed, strength and ferocity of Alfred's attack rather than a specific battle formation.

Archery was probably also used to break-up the shield-wall, as it was not an ideal position in which to receive arrows (it provided a large target, with little manoeuvrability), and the longbows known to have existed in this period would have penetrated shields and armour, though not necessarily deeply. A looser formation, allowing individuals freedom of movement, and the ability to use shields further out from the body, would have been more effective.

Mounted infantry were sometimes used to hunt down broken enemy forces, but the extent to which cavalry was used remains debatable. There is no doubt, however, that while a solid shield-wall provided a good defence against cavalry, mounted infantry would have been well-placed to attack looser formations once the shield-wall was broken.

Ashdown

8 January 871

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

The battle of Ashdown took place against the background of five years of large-scale Viking raiding. The *micel here* had landed in East Anglia in 865, and the Vikings were able to establish a temporary truce with the East Angles before moving on to Northumbria in 866. Contemporary accounts suggest a force of hundreds of ships, and thousands of men. While some modern historians have questioned the size and strength of this force, recent archaeological investigations suggest that these numbers are perfectly credible. The *micel here* was certainly powerful enough to defeat the combined forces of the two rival kings of Northumbria, Osberht and Ælle, in 866, killing both and taking possession of their kingdom. The following year the Vikings moved into the kingdom of Mercia, and established themselves at Nottingham, constructing a fortification there. The Mercian king, Burgred (r. 856–74), raised an army to try to dislodge them, aided by his brothers-in-law, King Æthelred I of Wessex and his brother Alfred, so the two brothers who led the West Saxons at Ashdown already had direct experience of conflict with the *micel here* before it arrived in their own kingdom two years later. The Mercian/West Saxon alliance was unsuccessful, however, and Burgred was forced to make peace with the Vikings. They returned to Northumbria the following year, and in 869 moved to East Anglia where the king of the East Angles, Edmund the Martyr (r. 855–69), was killed when he tried to defeat them in battle.

The Vikings typically arrived in winter, a time of year when military activity was unexpected, and took control of major royal and ecclesiastical



The fleet of the *micel here* arriving in England in 865, from a manuscript of the *Life, Passion and Miracles of St Edmund, King and Martyr*. The illustration dates from the 12th century, after the Viking Age, but shows the memory of the impact of the Vikings. Viking fleets varied in size from a handful to hundreds of ships. A fleet which attacked south-east England in the early 990s, and which may well have been the fleet that fought at Maldon in 991, was said to have contained 93 ships. Warships of the late 10th century seem typically to have been larger than those of the 9th century, and assuming a crew of 50 or more per ship rather than the minimum of 40 for the earlier period suggests a minimum force of over 4,500 men at Maldon. Given the wealth and resources of the late Anglo-Saxon state, and the fact that this force would have been depleted after the battle, it is hard to see how this and other Viking fleets could have been so successful at extorting *gelds* from England in the period that followed if they had not been on at least this scale; and the armies with which Svein Forkbeard and Cnut conquered England in 1013 and 1016 respectively were probably larger still. (Photo by Fine Art Images/Heritage Images/Getty Images)

estates, simultaneously supplying themselves with the accumulated winter stores of those estates, while denying those same stores to any local army which might oppose them. Seizing a major estate gave them both an initial body of supplies and a position of strength. From there, they could either negotiate a truce, which undoubtedly also included the right to re-supply themselves peacefully, or carry out further raids if the local population resisted them.

The Viking move into Wessex in the winter of 870–71 followed exactly the same pattern. The *micel here* moved south-west from East Anglia to the West Saxon royal estate of Reading, probably using the ancient trackway known in this area both as Icknield Street and the Ridgeway. As early as their first stay in East Anglia in 865–66, the Vikings had equipped themselves with horses in return for peace. Although there is no evidence for the *micel here* ever



A coin of Æthelred I, king of Wessex (r. 865–71). The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* tells us nothing of the forces led by Æthelwulf, *ealdorman* of Berkshire, at the battle of Englefield in 870, but both Asser and Æthelweard tell us that he had only a small number of men. This may mean that Æthelwulf was accompanied only by his household troops, but it is unclear what 'small' means in this context. Because the battle took place so soon after the arrival of the *micel here* in Wessex, it is uncertain whether Æthelwulf would have had the time to muster the whole of the Berkshire *fyrð*, and his force was probably composed of a mixture of household troops and levies from around the shire. Whether or not he had the entire Berkshire *fyrð* with him, the fact that the Viking force is said to have been led by only two *jarls*, compared to the two kings and five *jarls* who led the Vikings shortly afterwards at Ashdown, suggests that they represented a smaller portion of the total *micel here* than Asser implies, and perhaps only the personal followings of the two *jarls*. The relative proportions of the two forces may have been deliberately exaggerated to emphasize the significance of the West Saxon victory. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

fighting as cavalry, the horses meant that they could move quickly as mounted infantry. Since Reading lay on the borders of Wessex, this meant that they were able to arrive with little or no warning, and certainly before any effective defence could be mounted to prevent them taking control of Reading itself. The West Saxons had a network of look-out points and beacons across the kingdom which could be used to raise the alarm when enemies attacked, but it is not clear that they had any resources beyond their own borders to provide warning of an impending attack. Attacking in late December, when large-scale warfare was normally restricted to the period of spring through to early autumn, would have added to the element of surprise. The Vikings already had control of East Anglia, and only needed to cross a corner of the kingdom of Mercia to reach Reading. At the same time, Reading's position on the River Thames meant that the mounted forces could be reinforced by the main fleet sailing round from East Anglia, bearing both reinforcements and supplies. However, it was important for both sides to seize the initiative in taking control of the available supplies in the area around Reading, while the Vikings also sought plunder in the form of portable wealth.

The *micel here* arrived at Reading on 28 December 870, but on 31 December a mounted raiding party set out, probably to secure additional supplies, although Asser suggests that they rode out in search of plunder. The remainder fortified their camp at Reading by building a rampart between the River Thames and the River Kennet. The raiding party, described by Asser (but not by other sources) as 'a great part of the force' (Keynes & Lapidge 1983: 78), was led by two *jarls*, one possibly called Sidroc, but they were intercepted by a force led by Æthelwulf, *ealdorman* of Berkshire at Englefield, around 10 miles west of Reading. The absence of any detailed account of the ensuing battle means that it is uncertain whether the mounted Viking force used their horses in battle, or dismounted to fight. Whatever the exact composition of the two forces, the battle was a victory for Æthelwulf and the men of Berkshire. One of the Viking *jarls* was killed, and the remnants of the raiding force retreated to the camp at Reading. According to some texts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the *jarl* killed at Englefield was Sidroc, but this may represent confusion with the battle at Ashdown a few days later.

This initial battle gave time for Æthelred I and Alfred to muster troops from elsewhere in Wessex, and by 4 January 871 they had joined forces with Æthelwulf outside Reading. Again, the speed of the West Saxon response raises questions about how large their total force may have been. Asser states that the two brothers combined their forces, while the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* indicates a large army. Six days would have been enough to raise at least some of the *fyrð* from neighbouring shires in addition to the household troops of Æthelred I and Alfred, but it is less certain that all of the *fyrð* from the surrounding area would have gathered so quickly, and unlikely that all of the *fyrð* from more distant shires such as Dorset, Devon and Somerset could have reached Reading in such a short time. What is clear is that Æthelred I had sufficient troops at his disposal to feel confident enough to attack the Viking camp, even if that confidence proved to be misplaced. As noted, Æthelwulf is said to have attacked a large force with a smaller one, and Alfred is also said to have led attacks with only small forces at Ashdown and Wilton. This may reflect a recurrent (and unreliable) theme in the written sources of brave West



The Ridgeway along the top of the Ashdown Ridge. Although the precise location of the battle of Ashdown is unknown, the ancient trackway known as the Ridgeway offered a route into the heart of Wessex, and it is likely that the battle was to deny the Vikings progress along that route. (Author's Collection)

Saxons fighting whatever the odds, thus emphasizing the heroic character of leaders and warriors alike, but it may also be that Æthelwulf's success at Englefield had boosted both morale and expectations to the extent that not attacking would have seemed like cowardice.

The attack was initially successful, according to Asser. He tells us that they 'reached the gates of the stronghold by hacking and cutting down all the Vikings whom they had found outside' (Keynes & Lapidge 1983: 78). This may have included foraging parties, scouts, etc., but the account gives no further details. Even so,

the Vikings fought no less keenly; like wolves they burst out of all of the gates and joined battle with all of their might. Both sides fought there for a long time, and fought fiercely, but alas, the Christians eventually turned their backs, and the Vikings won the victory and were masters of the battlefield; and the ealdorman Æthelwulf mentioned above fell there, among others. (Keynes & Lapidge 1983: 78)

Æthelweard's Chronicle tells us merely that 'an indescribable battle broke out violently between them. Now one troop and now another went into battle with sharp weapons' (Campbell 1962: 37), while the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* simply states that 'great slaughter was made there on either side' (Swanton 1996: 70–71), although both confirm Æthelwulf's death and the Viking victory.

Æthelred I and Alfred were forced to retreat, and this created an opportunity for the Vikings to push further into Wessex. The Vikings' thinking at this point is uncertain. Having defeated Æthelred I once, their intention may have been to pursue him and either defeat him definitively or force his submission and a payment for peace, as they had previously done in East Anglia, and were to do again in Mercia. Alternatively, they may have been heading for specific targets in the heartland of Wessex, further to the west. Certainly over the course of 871 they drove the West Saxon forces gradually further to the west, and this may have been a strategic aim from the outset. Equally, their expansion later that year may have been driven by the fact that they were initially contained to the area of Reading, and were forced to range more widely to secure supplies. With that in mind, it is possible that the Vikings moved west in order to consolidate their control of north-eastern Wessex by seizing plunder and supplies from royal and ecclesiastical estates along the Thames Valley and to the south.

Whatever their motivation, a substantial part of the Viking force moved out of Reading four days after Æthelred I's failed attempt to attack the camp, but once again encountered the forces of Æthelred I and Alfred a few miles to the west at 'Ashdown', which Asser tells us meant the 'hill of the ash [tree]' (Keynes & Lapidge 1983: 79).

The Ashdown campaign, 870–71

MAP KEY

1 28 December 870: Vikings arrive at Reading from East Anglia and begin construction of a fortified camp by building a rampart between the River Thames and the River Kennet.

2 31 December 870: A raiding party led by two *jarls* travels west to Englefield, but is intercepted and defeated by a small West Saxon force led by Æthelwulf, *ealdorman* of Berkshire. One of the *jarls* is killed, and the survivors retreat to Reading.

3 4 January 871: Æthelwulf's forces meet up with the main West Saxon army led by King Æthelred I of Wessex and his brother Alfred and assault the Viking fortification at Reading. The Saxons are initially successful, driving the Vikings back to the gates of the fortification, but a sortie in force through the gates allows the Vikings to renew the battle outside, and eventually to gain victory. Æthelwulf is killed, and the remainder of the Saxon army retreats.

4 8 January 871: A substantial Viking force moves west from Reading, probably either crossing the River Thames at Moulsoford to a point on the Ashdown Ridge, or moving south of the Thames and approaching the ridge from the south. They are intercepted by West Saxon forces under Æthelred I and Alfred. The Vikings take up position uphill from the Saxons, separating into two divisions, one led by two kings, Halfdan and

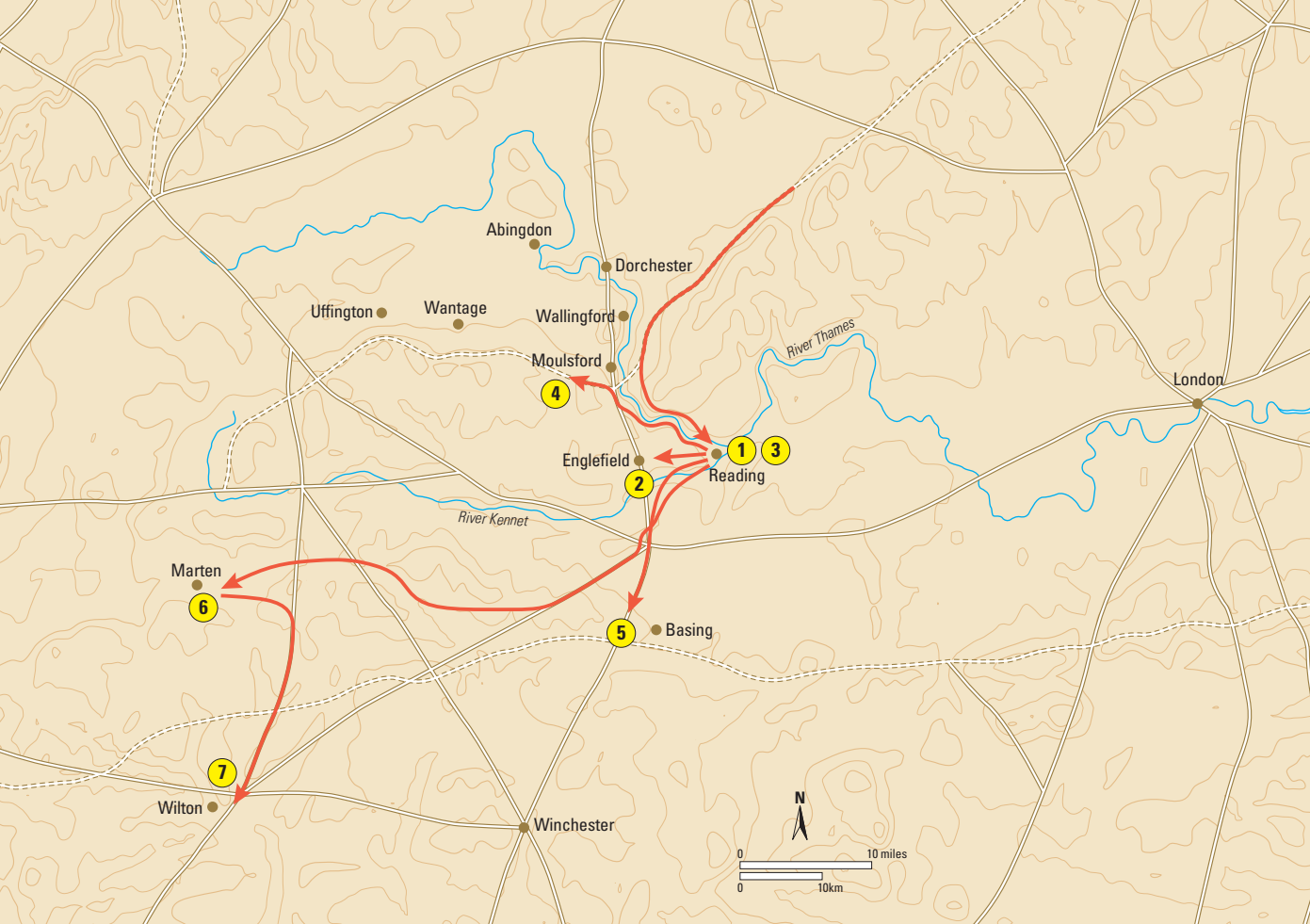
Bagsecg, the other by several *jarls*. The Saxons also divide into two divisions, so that Æthelred can confront the Viking division led by the kings, and Alfred the division led by the *jarls*. Alfred's division attacks first, while Æthelred insists on hearing Mass first to gain divine support. Æthelred's division joins the battle, attacking the Viking division led by the two kings. Bagsecg is killed, together with five of the *jarls* and many thousands of men. The survivors from both Viking divisions retreat to Reading.

5 22 January 871: A Viking force led by Halfdan moves south towards Winchester. It is intercepted by the Saxons under Æthelred and Alfred. The Vikings are victorious and hold the battlefield, but apparently do not progress further.

6 22 March 871: The Vikings move deeper into Wessex, and are intercepted by the West Saxons under Æthelred and Alfred at *Meretun*, possibly Marten in Wiltshire. The Vikings are victorious, and Æthelred may be mortally wounded as he dies about a month later.

7 May 871: The Viking force under Halfdan advances to Wilton, and is met by the West Saxon army led by Alfred, who has succeeded his brother as king. The Vikings are victorious. The Viking army disperses and raids the surrounding area. Later, Alfred makes peace with the Vikings.





Battlefield environment

The precise location of the battle of Ashdown is uncertain, and the name 'Ashdown' has been applied to the whole of the stretch of the north Berkshire downland which runs west from the crossing of the River Thames at Moulsoford up to the famous White Horse at Uffington in Oxfordshire. Some commentators have placed the battle at Uffington, both because of romantic associations with the White Horse, although this was already hundreds of years old, and because the Iron Age hillfort above it at Uffington represents one of the highest points in the landscape, and one of the places along the down where a Saxon army in the west could have been forced to attack uphill against a Viking army to the east, which seems to be implied by Asser's account. Both Uffington Castle and the White Horse are prehistoric, and there are numerous examples of prehistoric monuments being used as assembly places by the

Anglo-Saxons. Given its commanding view of the area, including the vulnerable Thames Valley, and its position on the ancient trackway along the top of the down known as the Ridgeway (which extended east to Reading and beyond, and west into the heartland of Wessex), Uffington might well have provided a defensible base where Æthelred I and Alfred could regroup after Reading, as well as mustering further units of the *fyrð* moving up from the south-west, even. However, there is no firm evidence to support this, and recent scholarship tends to prefer a site for the battle at the eastern end of the Downs near the ford of Moulsoford. A favoured site is Kingstanding Hill, a spur of the Downs overlooking the ford, but this interpretation derives in part from the name, which may not be of any great antiquity, and as yet there is no archaeological evidence to support this or any other location over the other possibilities.

OPPOSITE

Uffington Castle, a prehistoric hillfort which has been suggested by some writers as a possible location for the battle of Ashdown. Most modern commentators have placed the battle further east, but the castle may have been used as an assembly place for elements of the West Saxon *fyrð*, as prehistoric monuments often seem to have been used as convenient landmarks for public assembly, and would have been particularly useful as immediately recognizable points for levies from more distant parts who might be unfamiliar with the area. This is particularly true of Uffington Castle, which sits immediately above the great White Horse carved into the Downs in prehistory. (Author's Collection)

INTO COMBAT

In the only direct clue to the location of the battle, Asser tells us that 'the battlefield was not equally advantageous to both contending parties. The Vikings had taken the higher position first, and the Christians were deploying their battle-line from a lower position' (Keynes & Lapidge 1983: 79). This detail is not recorded in either the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* or *Æthelweard's Chronicle*, but Asser provides the most detailed account of the battle in all respects, and this detail is not in itself unlikely. Both sides would seek the advantage of high ground in battle, and if the Vikings had arrived at a suitable point first, it is reasonable to imagine that they would remain there, forcing the Anglo-Saxons to attack uphill. However, this does pose some difficulties for a straightforward interpretation of a Viking army moving westward being stopped in its tracks by a West Saxon army in its way, since this would involve the Vikings moving from low ground, across the River Thames, and then climbing the slopes of the Downs from the east. If, however, the West Saxons came from the west, they should already have been occupying higher ground. One possibility is that the Saxon army intercepted the Vikings not directly from the front but from one side. If, for example, Æthelred I and Alfred had retreated to one of the estates along the River Thames, they might also have started from low ground, and simply lost the race to the Downs. It is also possible that the Saxons may have faced the Vikings from two separate directions. Asser refers to the Saxons' position in the singular, but he also tells us that the army was divided into two divisions by prior arrangement. This may simply indicate a division into two flanks, but it could also indicate that the two divisions converged on the battlefield from different directions. If one brother led the survivors of Reading from the Thames Valley, while the other had gone to muster the *fyrð* from the western shires at some point further west along the Ridgeway, this could easily have created a situation whereby one force blocked the Viking advance along the Downs, and the other attacked from the flank or from behind. It is also possible that one or both brothers could have retreated south-west into Hampshire after their defeat at Reading, or that reinforcements from the south or east formed a major part of one of the divisions. Kent, Sussex and Surrey were all under long-established West Saxon rule at this time, and the possibility that the *fyrð* may have been summoned from these areas as well as from Wessex itself should not be excluded.

What information the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and *Æthelweard's Chronicle* do provide largely agrees with Asser's more detailed account. The West Saxon army was in two divisions, led by the two brothers respectively. These divisions would have included the remnants of the household troops of the two leaders, together with whatever parts of the *fyrð* they had managed to keep together in the retreat from Reading. Assuming that the *fyrð* was mustered as soon as the West Saxons heard of the arrival of the *micel here* at Reading, the extra four days would also have allowed for the arrival of fresh reinforcements from the western shires, and accounts of the scale of the battle suggest the presence of thousands of men on either side. Many of these would have been feeling the effects of fighting at Reading both on their physical

condition and their morale, while any reinforcements had probably travelled some distance over the days immediately preceding the battle. It is therefore unlikely that any of the West Saxon troops were particularly fresh.

The Vikings were probably little more rested than their opponents, it being less than two weeks since the entire force had travelled down from East Anglia to Reading. Some of those present had probably fought at Englefield, and many more at Reading, and it is likely that a large portion of the force had spent time since their arrival at Reading foraging and plundering to secure supplies and loot in the build-up to both of the previous battles. In addition, to reach the Downs, they had ridden or walked several miles that day from Reading. The *micel here* must have contained many tired men, and more than a few 'walking wounded'.

According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, at Ashdown the West Saxon *fyrð* faced a Viking force led by two kings and many *jarls*. This divided leadership, together with the less structured nature of the Viking army, might suggest that the Vikings were at an inherent disadvantage, but the *micel here* had first appeared in England over five years earlier, and elements within it had undoubtedly campaigned together previously – certainly long enough for the different elements to get used to working together on the battlefield – and the same force had defeated Æthelred I and Alfred at Reading only a few days before. At the same time, Æthelred I and Alfred were fighting on familiar territory (Alfred himself had been born nearby at Wantage), and may have been able to bring up additional levies from further west following their defeat at Reading, so both sides must have felt that there was a reasonable chance of victory.

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and *Æthelweard's Chronicle* both claim that the Viking force at Ashdown was the whole of the *micel here*. This is probably an exaggeration, as it is unlikely that they would have left the camp at Reading unguarded so soon after the battle there, but it was clearly a substantial proportion of the total force, and a much larger expedition than the one defeated at Englefield. It is also possible that it was a larger force than was actually engaged at Reading, since it is not clear from the brief accounts of the fighting at Reading that the whole of the *micel here* had joined the battle before the West Saxons fled. Many, but not necessarily all, of the main leaders were present, and Asser tells us that there were 'two kings and a large number of earls'; according to Asser the army, having split up 'into two divisions, organised shield-walls of equal size ... assigning the core of the army to the two kings and the rest to all the earls' (Keynes & Lapidge 1983: 79).

It is difficult to make complete sense of this. If the two shield-walls were equal, why was one the 'core' of the army and the other not? It is also hard to reconcile this idea of a 'core' with two matched flanks, so it seems more likely that the two formations were less equally balanced, and that the impression of equality was a literary device to match the two forces of Æthelred I and Alfred, although Asser states that it was in response to seeing the two Viking shield-walls that the Christians 'split up into two divisions in the same way and established shield walls no less keenly' with the plan that 'King Æthelred and his forces should engage the two Viking kings, while his brother Alfred and his troops should submit to the fortunes of war against all the Viking jarls' (Keynes & Lapidge 1983: 79). Whether or not the forces were indeed so neatly balanced, Asser thus provides evidence of the use of the

An early single-edged sword from Støveren Søndre, Buskerud, Norway. Both single- and double-edged swords were used by the Vikings, but while double-edged swords remained in use throughout the period, single-edged swords became rarer after the 9th century. (Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo; photograph: Eirik Irgens Johnsen and Ove Holst)



shield-wall formation by both sides, as well as of the division of both sides into multiple units. Within the two divisions on the Viking side, the *lið* of each king or *jarl* would have formed distinct sub-units, while on the Saxon side the household troops of Æthelred I, Alfred and other leading nobles would have formed distinct sub-units, as would the *fyrð* of each shire that was present, but even Asser provides no further information on the composition of the forces, while Æthelweard doesn't even mention the division of each force into two. It is important to remember here that Asser, writing just over 20 years after the battle, was not himself an eyewitness, but had spoken with people who were, including Alfred himself. Both Asser and Æthelweard also had access to a version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which also records the division of each side into two.

However, Asser and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* differ on what happened in the course of the battle. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* simply states that Æthelred I fought the division led by the two kings Bagsecg and Halfdan, and that Bagsecg was killed, while Alfred fought the force led by the *jarls*, and five of them were killed, namely Sidroc the Old, Sidroc the Young, Osbern, Fræna and Harald. It goes on to say that 'both raiding armies were put to flight, and there were many thousands of killed, and fighting went on till night' (Swanton 1996: 70–71). Æthelweard confirms the names and ranks of the fallen leaders, with the added comment that 'losses occurred on both sides on a great scale'. He adds that 'Æthelred won the crown of victory' and that 'all of the nobler youth of the barbarians fell there, so that neither before nor after has such a slaughter been heard of since the race of the Saxons won Britain in war' (Campbell 1962: 37). In addition to the names of the leaders, Asser and Æthelweard agree on a few key details. First, it seems clear that this was a battle on a large scale, with thousands of men on either side, both of which suffered heavy casualties. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's* statement that fighting went on until night seems to support Æthelweard's statement of heavy casualties to give the impression that it was a long and hard-fought battle before the West Saxons prevailed.

Only Asser provides further details of how that victory came about. According to him, Alfred and his men 'reached the battlefield sooner and in better order: for his brother, King Æthelred was still in his tent at prayer, hearing Mass and declaring firmly that he would not leave that place alive before the priest had finished Mass' (Keynes & Lapidge 1983: 79). By the standards of today's secular society such piety seems like folly, but in a period in which the Vikings were repeatedly portrayed as God's punishment on the Anglo-Saxons for their sinfulness, Æthelred I's recognition that he had a greater duty to God than to his men could be seen as an important contribution to the battle, since it helped to secure divine favour. Asser goes on to say that

Alfred could not oppose the enemy battle-lines any longer without the enemy either retreating from the battlefield or attacking the enemy forces before his brother's arrival on the scene. He finally deployed the Christian forces against the hostile armies as he had previously intended (even though the king has not yet come) and acting courageously, like a wild boar, supported by divine counsel and strengthened by divine help, when he had closed up the shield-wall in proper order, he moved his army without delay against the enemy. (Keynes & Lapidge 1983: 79)



A skull from the Ridgeway mass burial, near Weymouth, showing an injury from a sword cut. The sword has sliced off a section of the skull rather than just crushing it, indicating the sharpness of the weapon used as well as the force of the blow. (Oxford Archaeology)

In other words, he attacked in a close-order shield-wall formation; but the account provides no more detail of the subsequent battle, beyond confirming that both sides fought ‘to and fro, resolutely and exceedingly ferociously, for quite a long time’ before the Vikings ‘by divine judgement were unable to withstand the Christians’ onslaught any longer; and when a great part of their forces had fallen, they took to ignominious flight’ (Keynes & Lapidge 1983: 80). Asser confirms the names of the fallen leaders, and that thousands of the Vikings were slain.

Asser’s account supports the interpretation that the forces of Æthelred I and Alfred arrived separately, possibly from different directions. Curiously, Asser never explicitly indicates that Æthelred I ever joined the battle in person, although he implies that the king’s prayers may have helped secure the ‘divine help’ that strengthened Alfred’s attack. Asser, himself a bishop, stops short of criticizing Æthelred I for his piety, but implies that the victory was Alfred’s, and Alfred’s alone. This contrasts with the explicit statement in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* that Æthelred I fought the force of the two Viking kings, which in Asser formed part of the plan, but not the execution. It also contrasts with Æthelweard’s statement that Æthelred I won the crown of victory, with Alfred apparently relegated to a supporting role. It is difficult to know which of these versions is more accurate, but Alfred’s subsequent successes have led most historians to give him the primary credit for the victory at Ashdown. One must note, however, that Asser benefited from Alfred’s patronage, and his account comes from a work intended to glorify Alfred and his achievements, while Æthelweard was a direct descendant of Æthelred I, and may have chosen to give credit to his own ancestor, although any bias on his part is more subtle than that of Asser.

As previously noted, Asser also records that the Saxons were forced to attack uphill, and it is interesting to consider whether that applied to all of the Saxon army or to only one of the two divisions. If the latter, it makes a big difference

OPPOSITE

This statue of Alfred the Great was created by Count Gleichen (1833–91), a relative of Queen Victoria, and was unveiled in Wantage in 1877. At Ashdown Alfred was already heir-apparent to his older brother Æthelred I, as Alfred's royal nephew was still a child, and therefore too young to provide the necessary leadership in the face of the Viking threat. During the Ashdown campaign, Alfred appears to have acted as his brother's second-in-command of the West Saxon *fyrð* as a whole, but he also had independent tactical command of his own troops. The two brothers were the fourth and fifth sons respectively of Æthelwulf (r. 839–58), and succeeded their older brothers. As younger sons, they would have been trained from an early age both as warriors and commanders. Royal sons and brothers, along with *ealdormen* (senior royal officials who commanded the *fyrð* of individual shires), were typically the senior officers. Anglo-Saxon poetry suggests that Anglo-Saxon leaders were expected to fight alongside their men rather than commanding from the rear. This would have restricted their view of the wider tactical position once battle was joined, and effective tactical command would have been replaced in such circumstances by leadership by example, but scouts would probably have conveyed information up to that point. Asser's account of the battle of Ashdown indicates that Alfred as a sub-commander was sufficiently well informed of the tactical situation to take the initiative in engaging the enemy without waiting for his brother (and commander) to bring up his own forces. (Author's Collection)

to the interpretation of the battle. If Alfred chose to abandon an agreed strategy of a joint attack by the two divisions by attacking uphill with only half the available force, it could be seen as dangerous impetuosity, even if the hindsight of victory allows Asser to interpret it as divinely inspired wisdom. If, on the other hand, Alfred was already on top of the Downs and attacked 'as he had previously intended' (Keynes & Lapidge 1983: 79) while Æthelred I had to make a flanking attack uphill, this would explain why Æthelred I joined the battle later than his brother in what could have been a deliberate strategy to take the Vikings from an unexpected angle once they were already engaged. Either way, irrespective of whatever credit is due to each of the brothers, the result was a significant victory for the West Saxons to follow their defeat at Reading.

Asser adds the further details that the Viking dead were dispersed 'over the whole broad expanse of Ashdown, scattered everywhere, far and wide' and that those not slain in the battle were 'put to flight, right on until nightfall and into the following day, until such time as they reached the stronghold from which they had come. The Christians followed them till nightfall, cutting them down on all sides' (Keynes & Lapidge 1983: 80). Clearly the Vikings retreated in disarray eastwards to Reading, but the expanse of the area over which they fell, and the extended duration of their flight, may indicate that the main battle took place further into the Downs than Kingstanding Hill.

Although the three accounts vary in their emphasis, and in the level of detail provided, they agree in their presentation of the battle of Ashdown as a resounding victory for the West Saxons. However, given what followed, either the scale of the victory was exaggerated, or it was a Pyrrhic victory, leaving the West Saxons as damaged as the Vikings. Only two weeks later, Halfdan pushed southwest to Basing, where once again he faced the combined forces of Æthelred I and Alfred. 'They clashed violently on all fronts, but after a long struggle the Vikings gained the victory and were masters of the battlefield' (Keynes & Lapidge 1983: 80). Two months later, the brothers were defeated again at *Meretun*. The precise location of this battle is uncertain, and a number of possibilities have been proposed, of which Marten in Wiltshire is perhaps the most plausible.

Æthelred I died shortly after Easter (15 April), possibly as a result of wounds incurred at *Meretun* or one of the other battles, and it was as king that Alfred faced Halfdan again at Wilton around a month later, with the latter now reinforced by a 'great summer-fleet' (Swanton 1996: 72–73) that had arrived at Reading. Once again, Alfred chose to attack a superior force with smaller numbers, but this time without the success of Ashdown, and once again the Vikings had the victory after which, according to Æthelweard, they 'dispersed, carried off plunder and ravaged places' (Campbell 1962: 40). After initial success in containing the Vikings to the area around Reading, the next few months saw them push deep into the heart of Wessex, inflicting repeated defeats on the Saxons. Later in the year, Alfred 'made peace' with the Viking force (Campbell 1962: 40), but this is almost certainly a euphemism for paying them to leave his kingdom in peace, and at the end of the year they moved to a new camp at London, just over the border into Mercia. For all the praise heaped on him for the victory at Ashdown, Alfred 'the Great' ultimately resorted to paying the Vikings to leave his kingdom, a strategy more widely identified with his descendant Æthelred II (r. 978–1016), whose reign saw a new wave of Viking raiding, and featured another major battle.



Maldon

10 or 11 August 991

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

In the wake of the victory at Ashdown, Alfred took the opportunity to seize control of the southern part of the kingdom of Mercia, and under his son Edward the Elder (r. 899–924) and grandson Æthelstan (r. 924–39), West Saxon authority gradually extended further north and east until in 927 Æthelstan conquered northern Mercia and Northumbria, creating a unified kingdom of England for the first time. Æthelstan defended his new kingdom against a coalition of Vikings and other British rulers at the battle of Brunanburh in 937, but following his death in 939 his younger brothers Edmund I (r. 939–46) and Eadred (r. 946–55) faced repeated attempts to re-establish an independent Viking-ruled kingdom in the north of England before England was reunified by Eadred in 954.

That unification was consolidated under Eadred's nephew Edgar I 'the Peaceable' (r. 959–75), and the latter's reign saw little Viking activity in England, which has led some historians to draw a distinction between the 'First Viking Age' before Edgar I's reign and the 'Second Viking Age' which followed. However, historical sources record continued Viking activity around the rest of Britain and Ireland, so the peace of Edgar I's reign is more a reflection of his strength than his peaceful nature. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records in 975 that during his reign 'There was no fleet so proud, nor raiding army so strong, that fetched itself carrion among the English race' (Swanton 1996: 121). In 973 Edgar I also gained the submission of several other kings from around the British Isles, including Viking leaders from the Irish Sea,



The excavations at Coppergate, York, in 1976–81 revealed the remains of the most extensively preserved Viking settlement yet found in Britain, and one of the best anywhere in the Viking world. These included parts of timber buildings and thousands of individual finds. Together with finds from other sites, stray finds from the landscape and place-names, the Coppergate discoveries have helped to build a picture of the mixed Anglo-Saxon and Viking culture that developed in northern and eastern England following the conquests of the *micel here* of 865–79, and their subsequent settlement of large parts of England. (York Archaeological Trust)

so the overall impression is of a strong king. He was also a wealthy ruler, and under Edgar I and his successors, England was rich in imported silver, probably as the result of a growing wool trade.

Edgar I was succeeded by a young son, Edward ‘the Martyr’ (r. 975–78), who was murdered and replaced by another of Edgar’s sons, Æthelred II. The latter monarch’s name means ‘noble counsel’, but he was given the punning nickname of *unræd*, which means not ‘Unready’ but ‘lacking counsel’ or ‘badly advised’. Not only was Æthelred II a child when he came to the throne, but he was believed by many to be complicit in the murder of his older brother Edward ‘the Martyr’, which undermined the loyalty of many leading subjects. The strong central authority built up under his father disintegrated, leaving the *ealdormen*, who were the royal officials in charge of the shires effectively in independent control of their own regions.

An Anglo-Scandinavian cross from St Andrew's Church, Middleton, Yorkshire, dating from the 10th century. A scene on the front of the cross shows a Scandinavian warrior, surrounded by his weapons, c.10th century. The scene may possibly show a pagan weapon burial, of a type found in southern Scandinavia at this time. This is perhaps unlikely on a Christian monument, but other Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture combines Christian and pagan imagery, so this interpretation is not impossible. (Author's Collection)



This lack of unity, combined with England's wealth and the almost immediate perception that Æthelred II's power was weaker than his father's, meant that England was once again a tempting target for Viking raids, which had largely if not completely ceased during the reign of Edgar I 'the Peaceable'. A Viking raid on Southampton in 980 by seven ships was only the first of many small-scale raids recorded throughout the 980s, in some cases

launched from the Viking homelands of Scandinavia, and in others from Viking settlements in the British Isles, most notably the Isle of Man. Whereas Æthelred I and Alfred had only had to rule and protect ‘Greater Wessex’ – England south of the River Thames as far west as Devon – Æthelred II ruled a kingdom of England which had been united for a generation, and which covered the whole of modern England apart from Cumbria and north Lancashire. He had to rely on his *ealdormen*, one for each shire, to represent royal power across the country as a whole – including taking the lead in defence – but he lacked the authority to ensure that they did this effectively.

The raid that led to the battle of Maldon was on a different scale, and led to a full-scale battle between the crews of a fleet of 93 Viking ships, and the *fyrð* of Essex, probably involving several thousand men on either side, although precise numbers are not recorded. The Anglo-Saxons were led by Byrhtnoth, *ealdorman* of Essex, one of the longer-serving *ealdormen* in England at the time, and one who – unlike some of his fellows – demonstrated loyalty to his king and to his duty. Byrhtnoth was accompanied by his own household troops, and by the *fyrð* levied from the whole of Essex. The Viking fleet, like the earlier *micel here*, was probably led by multiple leaders, each with his own *lið*, and potentially drawn from all over Scandinavia and beyond. Different sources conflict slightly on the exact dates and leadership of recorded raids in the early 990s, but it seems likely that the fleet at Maldon in August 991 was led by among others Olaf Trygvasson, who went on in 995 to become king of Norway. The fleet may also have contained groups led by Jósteinn (possibly a maternal uncle of Olaf) and Guthmund, son of Steita. These two appear together with Olaf in a treaty with Æthelred II probably agreed in 994 but are named (without Olaf) as leaders of the fleet in 991 by the 12th-century chronicler John of Worcester. A raid on the River Thames in 994, which probably led to the treaty mentioned above, is said to have involved 94 ships – suspiciously similar in number to the 93 at Maldon in 991 – and to have been led by Olaf and Svein, normally identified as Svein Forkbeard, king of the Danes (r. 986–1014). If Svein was associated with the same fleet in 991 and 994, he may also therefore have been one of the leaders at Maldon, but there is no direct evidence to suggest this.



An aerial view of the Viking ring fortress of Trelleborg, near Slagelse in Denmark. This was one of a number of fortresses of similar design built in the 970s and early 980s by Harald Bluetooth (r. c.958–86). The building of such fortresses required massive resources, and has been linked by some scholars with the conquest of England by Harald's son Svein Forkbeard. Use of the fortresses was short-lived, however, and while Trelleborg may still have been occupied at the time of the battle of Maldon in 991, it was almost certainly abandoned before Svein turned his mind to conquest more than a decade later. (Thue C. Leibrandt/CC BY-SA 3.0)

The Maldon campaign, 991

MAP KEY

- 1** A Viking fleet of 93 or 94 ships raids Folkestone.
- 2** The Viking fleet continues round the coast to Sandwich, and raids the town.
- 3** The Viking fleet sails north to Ipswich, and raids the town.
- 4** **10 or 11 August:** The Vikings land on Northey Island in the estuary of the River Blackwater and disembark. The tidal causeway protects the fleet from attack via land, but also limits the Vikings' access to the mainland.
- 5** **10 or 11 August:** *Ealdorman* Byrhtnoth and the Essex *fyrð* take up position at the end of the causeway to deny the Vikings access to the mainland.
- 6** **10 or 11 August:** The Vikings unsuccessfully attempt to negotiate payment of tribute rather than fight.
- 7** **10 or 11 August:** The Vikings attack along the causeway, but are unable to penetrate the Anglo-Saxon shield-wall, and withdraw.
- 8** **10 or 11 August:** The Vikings resume negotiations, this time to be allowed to fight on the tidal saltings on the mainland side of the causeway.
- 9** **10 or 11 August:** Byrhtnoth withdraws his forces sufficiently to allow the Vikings to form up on the mainland. In the ensuing battle Byrhtnoth is killed, and after further losses his army flees, leaving the Vikings in possession of the battlefield.
- 10** **10 or 11 August:** The Vikings advance to Maldon and sack the town.
- 11** Following their victory at Maldon, a Viking fleet threatens London, but the Vikings are bought off with a tribute of £10,000 of silver.

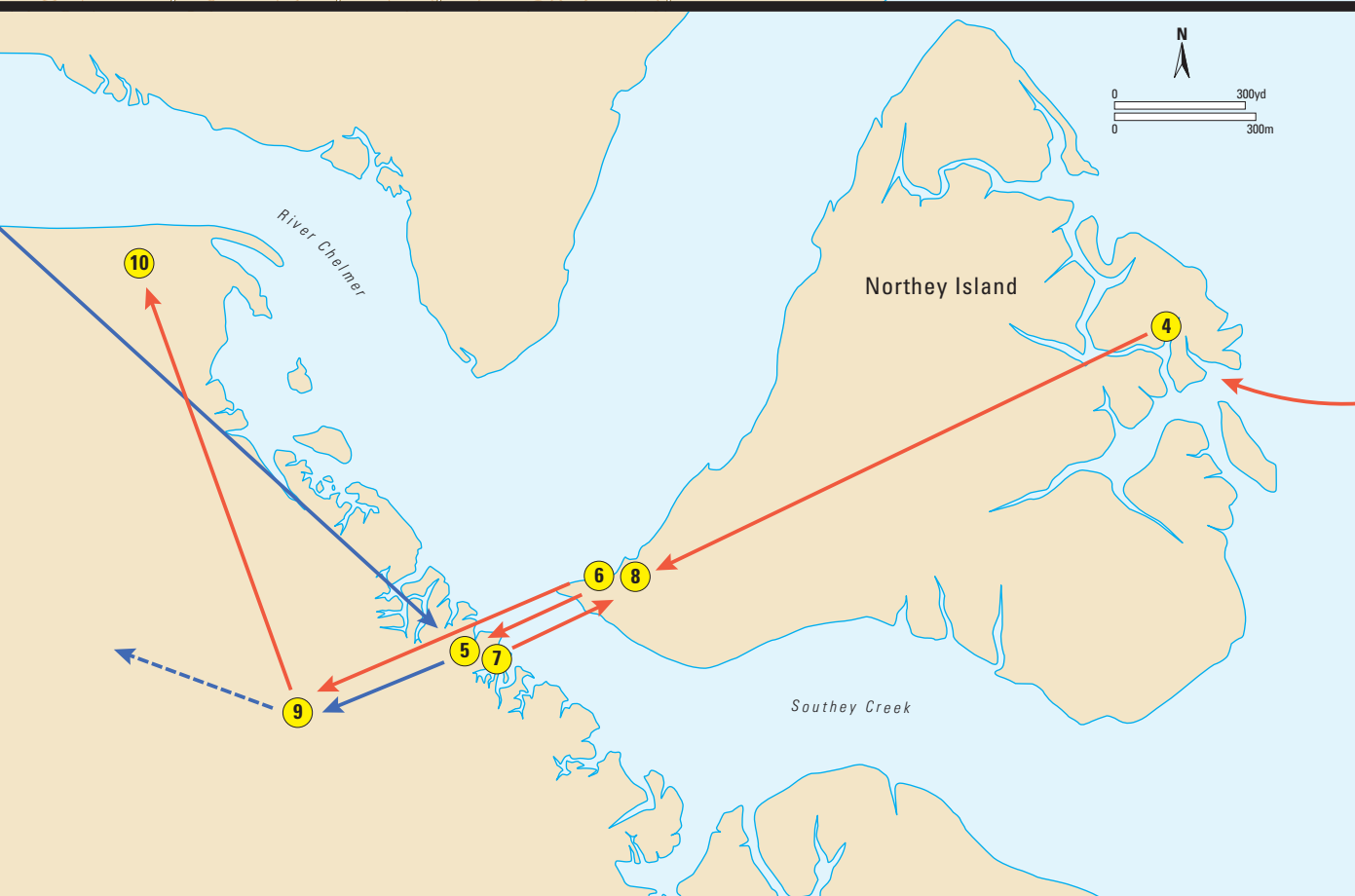
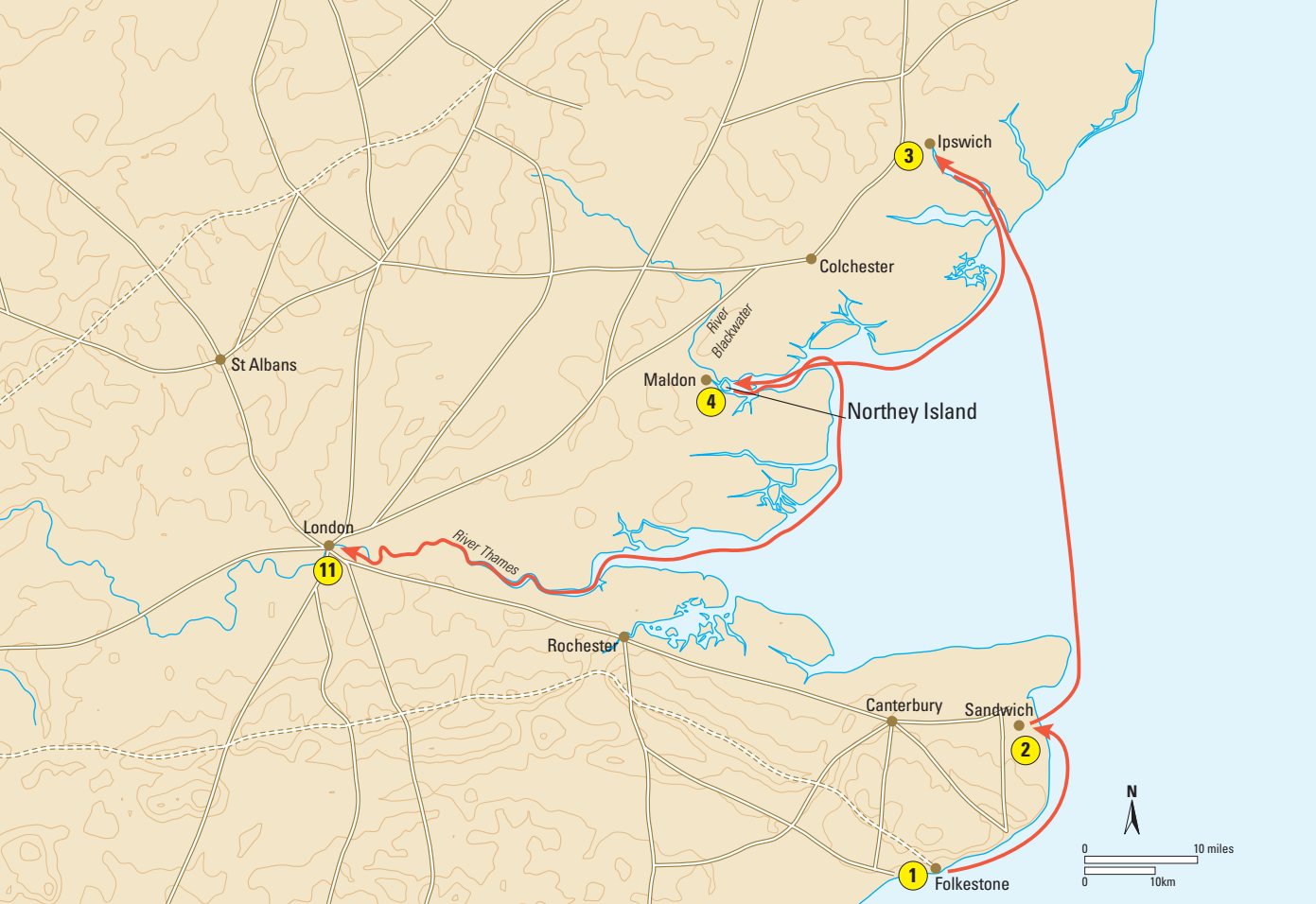
Battlefield environment

The Viking fleet anchored off Northey Island, on the estuary of the River Blackwater, close to the town of Maldon in Essex, and connected to the mainland by a tidal causeway. Byrhtnoth, *ealdorman* of Essex, was able to gather troops to oppose them on the mainland opposite. The two sides were thus separated by a stretch of water and a narrow causeway, with low and reasonably flat (if slightly marshy) ground suitable for battle on either side, and with each side clearly visible to the other. For either side, attempting to force a crossing of the causeway meant fighting at a disadvantage, as the advancing troops would move into missile range, but only a small number could engage.

Byrhtnoth had control of the resources of the local mainland, and the loyalty of the population, but the Vikings had the strategic mobility offered by their ships, and could have re-embarked to raid elsewhere, almost certainly outpacing

Byrhtnoth's pursuit on land. By waiting for high tide to re-embark, the Vikings could even do so without sacrificing a rearguard to cover their retreat. Thus neither side could be forced into advancing on disadvantageous terms, and the terrain favoured a defensive position for both sides. However, Byrhtnoth had the responsibility of protecting a wider area, and would have been aware that while he had access to supply routes on land, the Vikings could only resupply by abandoning their position and raiding elsewhere, so he could not risk attempting to wait them out.

Byrhtnoth therefore made the decision to abandon control of the causeway and allow the Vikings to fight on equal terms on the tidal saltings on the mainland side of the causeway, as he knew that this was the only way that he could guarantee to bring the Vikings to battle. Once he did so, the landscape ceased to offer any tactical advantage to either side.



INTO COMBAT

Straightforward historical references to the battle of Maldon provide only scant information on the events that immediately preceded the fighting; they note that the battle was a victory for the Vikings and that Byrhtnoth was killed, and that a tribute of £10,000 to pay off the Vikings was subsequently agreed. Because Byrhtnoth had been a generous patron of the Church, records from a number of religious houses which he had supported also record his death, providing a date for the battle of 10 or 11 August 991. What sets Maldon apart from other battles is that it was commemorated in a poem, *The Battle of Maldon*, probably composed a few years later, which provides more detail about the course of the battle itself. The poem places the battle just outside the town of Maldon, where the small island of Northey in the River Blackwater is linked to the mainland by a tidal causeway. The Vikings had landed on the island, and initially had to fight their way across the causeway, but according to the poem Byrhtnoth abandoned the strategic advantage of the ground and let them come ashore to fight on the mainland, ultimately resulting in his own death. Opinion is divided as to whether Byrhtnoth's willingness to abandon this advantageous position was the result of pride and tactical stupidity, or strategic necessity.

The poem, which only partially survives, and lacks both its beginning and its end, provides a graphic account of the battle, and can be used to construct a stage-by-stage view of how the battle progressed, while also providing additional detail about the composition of Byrhtnoth's forces, about the relationship between Anglo-Saxon lords and their followers, and about aspects of the combat which took place. The problem with this is that nothing that the poem tells us can be directly verified from other sources, and the poem by its very nature needs to be seen as a literary work rather than – or as well as – a historical source. There has therefore been extensive argument between both historians and literary scholars as to how 'historical' the battle of Maldon was.

There is some debate as to when exactly the poem was written, with some scholars preferring a date in or after the reign of Cnut (r. 1016–35), but most recent commentators have placed it in the reign of Æthelred II, although it is uncertain just how soon after the battle it was written. The composition of the poem can plausibly be seen in the context of the shift towards paying off Viking fleets rather than offering effective resistance. While most scholars see the noble Byrhtnoth of the poem, dutifully defending his land and people despite the cost to himself, as a deliberate contrast to the cowardice and treachery of other *ealdormen* in the final years of Æthelred II's reign, it has also been argued that the poem is surprisingly neutral in its coverage of the Vikings, and critical of Byrhtnoth's determination to fight even though he was offered the option to redeem himself and his people through tribute. Based on this interpretation, the poem was intended for an audience only a few years after the battle, when some of the Vikings had taken service with Æthelred II, and tribute had been paid, the underlying message being that the fate of Byrhtnoth and his men had been an avoidable waste, and that further tribute payments were a better option.

Such an interpretation reflects a view that can be offered by historians with the benefit of hindsight, and one which was undoubtedly shared by some of Æthelred II's leading councillors, both among the *ealdormen*



The tidal causeway linking Northey Island to the mainland just outside the town of Maldon. The close correspondence between this causeway and the account in the Anglo-Saxon poem describing the battle makes it reasonably certain that the battle was fought here, with the Anglo-Saxons initially denying the crossing to the Vikings, but subsequently permitting them to cross to fight a pitched battle on the mainland, with disastrous results. (Dr Sam Newton)

and the bishops; and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records immediately after its reference to Byrhtnoth's death at Maldon that 'in that year it was first decided tax be paid to the Danish men because of the great terror they wrought along the sea coast. That was at first 10 thousand pounds. Archbishop Sigeric decided on the decision' (Swanton 1996: 127). One version associates Bishop Ælfheah of Winchester as well as Sigeric with that decision, rather than any of the *ealdormen* who might plausibly have led any resistance. Such advice undoubtedly contributed to Æthelred II's punning nickname of *unræd*.

The idea that death in battle was a worthy end, and a suitable repayment for a lord's generosity, while choosing to save oneself in defeat was both disloyal and cowardly, is one that can be found repeatedly not only in Anglo-Saxon literature but in some episodes recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. This view probably reflects a genuine ideal within Anglo-Saxon warrior culture that death was preferable to cowardice, and it was not unique to the Anglo-Saxons in this period. A similar idea can be seen in Viking poetry and the later saga literature derived from it, and is one of the many things that link Anglo-Saxon and Viking warriors rather than dividing them. Such a view underlies the way in which the decisions of both Anglo-Saxons and Vikings on the losing side at Stamford Bridge in 1066 were portrayed in the sagas.

Thus, while the poem must be seen as work of literature, it probably reflects wider attitudes within the society of the time. The detail of individual speeches and motivations within the battle may owe something to the imagination of the poem's anonymous author, but the poem agrees with the topography of the battleground, and such details as it gives of battle, weapons and armour and even the identities of some of the minor characters are consistent with other evidence of the period, both archaeological and historical. Therefore, while it cannot be used as a reliable, blow-by-blow account of the whole battle, there seems no good reason to doubt its value in offering a framework for the main sequence of events, as follows.

The two sides were positioned at either end of the tidal causeway across the River Blackwater linking Northey Island to the mainland. Byrhtnoth had the horses sent to the rear. (This is portrayed in the poem as being intended to

discourage his men from flight if the battle turned out badly, but was normal practice for mounted infantry. Given the likely size of the two armies, and of the battlefield itself, the ranks of infantry must have been so deep that those towards the front would have had to retreat through a press of men before they could come anywhere near the horses if they wished to flee.) Byrhtnoth then positioned the men as he wanted them, and supposedly encouraged them to follow their training and do their duty. He took his own position 'amongst the people where it most pleased him to be, / where he knew his household companions to be most loyal' (Scragg 1991: 19). A Viking spokesman then offered that the Vikings would be willing to leave in peace if Byrhtnoth was 'willing to ransom your people, / Willing to give to the seafarers, in an amount to be determined by them, / money in exchange for peace, and to accept protection from us, / we are content to embark with the taxes, / to set sail across the sea, and to keep peace with you all' (Scragg 1991: 19).

This is exactly the sort of 'making peace' which had been common between Viking armies and their Frankish and Anglo-Saxon enemies in the late 9th century, and which was to occur repeatedly in Æthelred II's reign. The exact wording aside, there is no reason to doubt that such an offer was made. Nor, given that we know that the battle then took place, is there any doubt as to the poem's account that Byrhtnoth then refused the offer, advancing his troops to the end of the causeway, and that the Vikings did the same. Both sides then had to wait for the tide to go out sufficiently for the Vikings to cross the causeway, during which time they exchanged arrows. It has been suggested by some that with the likely line of the riverbank at the time, the distance between the opposing forces would have been around 450yd at high tide, too far for serious archery, but the poem itself only indicates that such archery occurred before the tide cleared the causeway enough to make it passable. This meant that to block the causeway effectively, Byrhtnoth's troops would have had to advance as the tide receded, while the Vikings would have had to do the same at the other end. The causeway would have left a gap of only 90yd, well within the range of the longbows of the period, and some archers may have advanced further onto the emerging causeway on either side.

Once the causeway was usable, it was narrow enough for a front rank of three men to block it, while the Vikings queued up behind their own front rank would have been much more vulnerable not just to arrows but to throwing spears. The Vikings must have realized that they would be unable to force the crossing before the tide changed again, the result of which would be stalemate. The poem tells us that therefore 'the hateful visitors started to use guile, / they asked to be allowed to have passage, / to cross over the ford, to advance their troops. / Then because of his pride the noble set about / allowing the hateful race too much land' (Scragg 1991: 21).

Thus, Byrhtnoth made the fateful decision to yield the crossing, ceding the advantage he had, and allowing the Vikings to fight on more equal terms on the tidal saltings on the mainland side of the causeway. This decision was central to allowing a pitched battle to occur at all; without it the Anglo-Saxons could not have been defeated, and Byrhtnoth and many of his followers killed. Unsurprisingly, the decision has been the subject of much debate and controversy ever since. The poet attributes Byrhtnoth's decision to *ofermod* ('excessive pride') and clearly takes the view, with the benefit of hindsight, that

it was a mistake on Byrhtnoth's part to allow the Vikings across, while praising his personal bravery in the battle, and his loyalty and honour in fighting the battle at all. This interpretation of Byrhtnoth's decision as a major tactical blunder is widespread, but some commentators have seen it as an extension of his honourable character as portrayed elsewhere in the poem, and effectively as an example of doing the wrong thing for the right reasons. Byrhtnoth can even be seen as an early exemplar for the peculiarly British attitude that it doesn't matter if you lose, as long as you do so in a sportsmanlike manner.

There is no doubt that Byrhtnoth's decision to let the Vikings onto the mainland turned out to be a tactical error, but judging him on that decision alone ignores the bigger strategic picture. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* tells us, and Byrhtnoth would have been well aware, that the Viking fleet had come first 'to Folkestone, and then they ravaged round about it, and they went to Sandwich, and so from there to Ipswich, and overran it all, and so to Maldon' (Swanton 1996: 126). The strategic mobility of the Vikings meant that they had already been able to plunder three significant towns on or near the coast and apparently to leave without significant opposition. If Byrhtnoth refused to allow the Vikings to cross the causeway, they could simply wait for high tide to protect their retreat, and then sail away to attack another target, such as Canterbury or London, or even another part of the coast of Byrhtnoth's own shire of Essex, and they would almost certainly manage to do so before a suitable force could be mustered to oppose them. Denying the Vikings the chance to come ashore would have protected Maldon and Byrhtnoth's men, but potentially at a much higher cost.

It seems unlikely that Byrhtnoth knew that he would lose the battle, since the almost inevitable consequence of that would be the looting of Maldon, and it seems likely that he made a decision to take that chance against the possibility that he might win the battle and thereby protect not only Maldon but the rest of south-east England in the process. We do not have any direct evidence to indicate whether Byrhtnoth was also motivated by 'excessive pride' or by a desire for glory, and those possibilities cannot be ruled out, but as long as he thought that there was a reasonable chance that he could win the battle, it was strategically the right decision.

Once that decision was made, we are told that the Vikings quickly crossed the causeway, and that Byrhtnoth ordered his men to form a shield-wall to defend against them, and battle was joined: 'Then the fight was near, / glory in battle, the time had come / when those fated to die must fall there' (Scragg 1991: 23). The poem describes the use of bows and throwing spears, alongside accounts of hand-to-hand combat, the implication being either that both sides formed shield-walls in opposition to each other, or that the Vikings simply charged the Anglo-Saxon shield-wall, with both sides supporting their front ranks with missiles from behind. If, as indicated, some of the individuals described as being killed were indeed cut down with swords, this would indicate that the Anglo-Saxon shield-wall opened up into loose order, as there would otherwise be little room to use swords effectively. However, since we do not know to what extent the poet had access to eyewitness accounts, the extent to which any of the detail of this phase of the battle can be accepted is questionable. We are told that Byrhtnoth himself was twice wounded with throwing spears, before having his arm disabled in hand-to-hand combat,



Silver penny of Æthelred II. Coinage was minted on a massive scale in England in the late 10th and 11th centuries, although there is no evidence for large-scale silver mining in England during this period. The bulk of the silver probably represents the balance of trade with Continental Europe, and especially with Germany. England's wealth in portable goods made it an obvious target for raiding, and Sandwich, Ipswich and Maldon all had mints as well as being port towns, which suggests that coin as well as trade goods would have been available for plunder in significant quantities in all three towns in 991. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)





The clash of shield-walls

The battle of Maldon is seen from the perspective of a warrior in the English *fyrð*. The equipment of the two sides is very similar, and in both armies the close-packed nature of the combat means that most of those in the front rank are fighting with the short *seax*, rather than with more cumbersome weapons, while those in the ranks behind thrust through with spears. The Vikings are distinguishable by the presence of a few spectacle helmets, and some two-handed axes. In the background, Viking reinforcements are crossing the tidal

causeway from Northey Island where their ships are beached. Both sides are supported by archers, and by the use of throwing spears. Not all of the English *fyrð* have mail shirts or metal helmets. The better-armed warriors, some of whom will be Byrhtnoth's personal followers, are at the front, while some of those in the rear ranks rely upon coats padded with linen or horsehair, and wear helmets of boiled leather. In the English front rank, one of Byrhtnoth's *thegns* flourishes his sword as he encourages the men around him.

and then being cut down along with the companions alongside him after a final short speech rallying his men. Whatever the truth of those details, contemporary sources agree that he was killed.

The death or flight of a leader was often a turning point on the battlefield, and much depended upon how those around reacted to it. At the battle of Hastings in 1066, Duke William II of Normandy famously removed his helmet to reassure his men that he was alive when it was rumoured that he had been killed, in order to stop them fleeing. According to the poem, different members of Byrhtnoth's personal following reacted to his death in contrasting ways. One named Godric supposedly fled from the battle on Byrhtnoth's own horse, accompanied by his two brothers, despite the loyalty that they owed to Byrhtnoth for his past generosity towards them; the established basis of the ties between lord and followers. We are told explicitly that 'too many men believed, when he rode away on the horse, / on the prancing steed, that it was our lord: / because of that the army became fragmented on the battlefield, / the shield wall smashed to pieces. Blast his action, / that he should have put so many men to flight here' (Scragg 1991: 27).

According to this, the perception that Byrhtnoth was fleeing was more damaging to the morale of his troops than his actual death, since his death might inspire his companions to fight on in his memory, whereas there was no such incentive for warriors to continue to fight if they believed that their lord had already quit the battle. We are told that others among Byrhtnoth's retinue did continue to fight, and to take up the burden of leading and encouraging the rest of the army, highlighting the dual role of the more senior *thegns* both as the household troops and bodyguard of their lord, but also as officers within the army as a whole. Despite their efforts, however, they were unable to prevent the Viking victory, although the end of the poem is lost, and there is no surviving account of the end of the battle or its immediate aftermath.

Again, there is no way to separate fact from fiction in this part of the account, but the demoralizing effect of Byrhtnoth's loss has many parallels. If, as suggested, the Anglo-Saxon shield-wall collapsed at this point, that would have offered an immediate tactical advantage to the Vikings, while the collapse of the formation would also have made it much harder for surviving members of Byrhtnoth's household to take effective command. What is less

clear is whether Byrhtnoth was killed because the battle was already turning against the Anglo-Saxons, leaving him exposed as a result of a shield-wall which was already breaking, or whether he was leading from the front, and his death precipitated the collapse, or perhaps something in between. The poem implies that his death was the beginning of the end of the battle, with no clear advantage to either side prior to that, but again the historical value of the poem on such details must be questioned, not least because it clearly does aim to portray Byrhtnoth as a hero. Nevertheless, if the outcome of the battle did indeed hinge on Byrhtnoth's death, that would support the view that the potential outcome of the battle was less obvious up to that point than it has been to commentators with the benefit of hindsight.

Like the battles of the late 9th century, Maldon was still essentially a clash between the loose structure of a Viking force composed of the separate *lið* of individual leaders, and a more formally structured Anglo-Saxon army, with the leader's household troops at the core of a levy also drawn primarily from a class of landed warriors. We have no idea exactly how the Viking army broke down into smaller units, although these may well have been of diverse origins; still less of whether those units formed separate divisions, as at Ashdown, or a single battle-line with their backs to the river. Nor can we know or even realistically estimate the relative size of the two armies, and whether or not either side enjoyed an appreciable numerical advantage.

The lesson of Ashdown and the other battles of 871 was that these different types of army fought on very much equal terms, and that even a major victory in a sequence of battles did not guarantee victory in the next. Since only the men of Essex were defeated at Maldon, there is no reason to believe that the *fyrð* of other shires, under other leaders, could not subsequently have defeated the victorious Viking fleet. Instead, the decision was made to pay a *geld* of £10,000 to the Vikings instead of engaging them in battle. It is possible that the fact that Maldon was the first battle after a long pause in major Viking raids in England, coupled with the death in battle of one of the most senior *ealdormen* in the kingdom, may have had a greater effect on English morale than might otherwise have been the case. Æthelred II's lack of authority and leadership may also have been a factor.

Whatever the precise reasons for the change in strategy from combat to appeasement, the legacy of the Viking victory at Maldon was the payment of *geld*, which came to be characteristic of Æthelred II's reign. It is arguable that the battle depleted the Viking forces enough that they were prepared to accept tribute whereas they might otherwise have insisted on plundering elsewhere. It is also true that the cost of continued Viking raiding if unchecked might have been higher than the £10,000 paid. However, if the poem is to be believed, the Vikings had already indicated at the outset of the battle of Maldon that they were willing to accept payment in return for peace. Far from being a unique failing of Æthelred II's reign, such payments had been a regular feature of peace agreements between the Vikings and their enemies in the 9th century, even including Alfred, whose ultimate success against the Vikings is often contrasted with Æthelred II's failure. Nevertheless, if the payment of *geld* was the price of peace at the beginning of the battle of Maldon, and *geld* on top of the plunder of Maldon and the surrounding area was the end result, the death of Byrhtnoth and his men in the battle was ultimately wasted effort.

Bronze statue of Byrhtnoth, *ealdorman* of Essex. The statue was made by sculptor John Doubleday in 2006 to commemorate the battle, and is situated at the end of the Promenade in Maldon, with the statue facing out across the River Blackwater to Northey Island and the battle site. (Author's Collection)



Stamford Bridge

25 September 1066

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

The Viking raids of the 980s and 990s led to large amounts of tribute being paid, and eventually to the conquest of England by Svein Forkbeard, king of the Danes, in 1013, although Svein's death in 1014 meant that his son Cnut had to fight to re-establish control until the deaths of Æthelred II and his son Edmund II Ironside, in 1016. Under Cnut, England and Denmark formed a joint kingdom, which later expanded to include Norway, but this empire collapsed under Cnut's sons Harold I Harefoot (r. 1035–37) and Harthacnut (r. 1037–42), and a younger son of Æthelred II, Edward the Confessor (r. 1042–66), regained the English throne.

King Edward died childless on 5 January 1066, and the contested succession formed the background to what is often seen as the final act of the Viking Age in England. Unlike earlier Viking raids for profit, the war of 1066 was between national armies, supplemented in some cases by mercenaries and adventurers in the traditional Viking fashion, and between rival claimants who could all, to varying degrees, argue a claim to the English throne. England's wealth made it an important prize, and although Edward's brother-in-law Harold Godwinsson became King Harold II (r. January–October 1066), Edward's cousin Duke William II of Normandy claimed that Edward had promised him the throne, while Harald Hard-Counsel, king of Norway since 1046, made a claim to be the (indirect) heir of Harthacnut. England would therefore face simultaneous invasions from Normandy and Norway in the autumn of 1066, resulting in two major battles in Yorkshire,

Fulford and Stamford Bridge, as well as the more famous battle near Hastings in Sussex. Stamford Bridge can only be understood in the context of this three-way campaign.

Harold's brother Tostig, earl of Northumbria (1055–65), also played an important role in the events of 1066. Tostig lost his earldom after being accused of tyranny by the Northumbrian people, who demanded his exile and supported the appointment of Morcar, a son of the rival house of Mercia, in his place. This demand was also supported by Morcar's older brother Edwin, earl of Mercia. Harold, as the king's negotiator, had agreed to this, and when he became king secured his position by marrying Edith, the sister of Edwin and Morcar. Tostig thus had what he believed to be a claim to the kingdom of Northumbria and a grudge not only against Edwin and Morcar, but also his brother Harold. He sought support from his father-in-law, Count Baldwin IV of Flanders, and may well also have visited William in Normandy during his exile before moving on, according to later sagas, first to Denmark and then to Norway. Tostig formed an alliance with Harald Hard-Counsel of Norway, and fought on his side at Fulford and Stamford Bridge, but the sources disagree as to whether he went to Norway in person, or merely negotiated with Harald through an ambassador at that stage.

The summer of 1066 thus saw Harold II as the incumbent king, but certainly aware that William planned to invade, and that Tostig was also liable to return from exile to cause problems. He may also have been aware of Harald Hard-Counsel's plans, but the much greater distance between England and Norway, and the weak nature of Harald's claim, may have meant that his actions were observed less carefully than those of William in neighbouring Normandy. The extent to which Harald Hard-Counsel and William knew of each other's plans and may even have coordinated their

Harald Hard-Counsel, king of Norway, is depicted on a ship in this wall painting at Skamstrup, Denmark. According to later tradition, Harald asserted that he inherited a claim to the English throne via his nephew Magnus Olafsson from Harthacnut, who had been king of both Denmark (r. 1035–42) and England (r. 1037–42). Magnus, as king of Norway (r. 1035–47), had recovered Norway from Danish domination. He and Harthacnut, both young men without children, had eventually made peace and supposedly agreed as part of the terms that whichever survived the longer would inherit the other's kingdom. When Harthacnut died in 1042, however, his English kingdom passed to his half-brother Edward the Confessor, while Denmark was claimed by a cousin, Svein Estrithsson. Magnus also claimed Denmark, and fought a prolonged war against Svein. Harald Hard-Counsel, returning from time abroad in the Byzantine Empire and Russia, initially sided with Svein against Magnus, but changed sides, agreeing to share his accumulated treasure with Magnus in return for sharing the kingdom of Norway in 1046. Magnus died in 1047, leaving Harald as sole king of Norway. Any claim that Magnus may have had to inherit from Harthacnut was probably limited to Denmark, but Harald spent most of his reign trying unsuccessfully to gain the Danish throne. (Photo by Ann Ronan Pictures/Print Collector/Getty Images)



Harold Godwinsson

Harold Godwinsson was born in the early 1020s. His father Godwine was the earl of Wessex, while his Danish mother Gytha was closely linked by marriage to the Danish royal house. Godwine was the power behind the throne in the early part of the reign of Edward the Confessor (r. 1042–66) and Harold's sister Edith became Edward's wife in 1045. Harold himself became earl of East Anglia c.1044–45, giving him a position of both military and civil leadership. This may have led to some military action, either against Vikings in 1048 or in support of the emperor of Germany in 1049, as by 1049 Harold had commanded one or more of the king's ships.

In 1051 Harold was involved in a confrontation between his father and the king. Both sides raised armies, but rather than confronting the king in battle, Godwine and his sons chose to go into exile. Harold went to Ireland, but returned to England the following year with a small fleet, raiding in Somerset and Devon before travelling round the south coast to meet his father, and forcing a reconciliation with Edward. Following Godwine's death in 1053 Harold succeeded his father as earl of Wessex, and became the king's

chief minister and general until Edward's death in January 1066.

During this period Harold's main military activity was against the Welsh king Gruffydd ap Ilewellyn. Harold established defences at Hereford in 1055 following a successful raid by Gruffydd. In 1063 Harold took the battle to Gruffydd, leading an attack by land on Rhuddlan. He followed this with an attack on Gruffydd's heartland of Gwynedd, using fleets around the coast in support of his land attack to force the Welsh king to retreat into the mountains, where he was killed by his own followers. Following this, Harold also led an army to confront Northumbrian rebels, but the matter was settled by negotiation rather than battle, with Edward and Harold accepting the rebels' demands, although these included the removal of Harold's brother Tostig as earl of Northumbria. In 1064, Harold may have gained additional military experience in Normandy. By the time he became king in 1066, he thus had extensive military experience, including successful strategic leadership, but there is no record that he had yet fought in a major battle.

attacks is also uncertain. In any case, Harold left the defence of Northumbria in the hands of the young Morcar, while Morcar's brother Edwin was responsible for the defence of the Midlands. Either or both may have received support from Waltheof, earl of Huntingdon. It is uncertain whether Waltheof was involved in the events of 1066. He is not mentioned in the English sources, but is mentioned alongside Morcar in the Scandinavian sources, although they wrongly make him a brother of both Morcar and Harold, whereas he was in fact the son of Siward, Tostig's predecessor as earl of Northumbria, and thus the representative of the third of the great earldom families of England in this period, and a potential rival both to Morcar and to Tostig for control of Northumbria. The presence of such fundamental errors in the saga accounts does not command confidence in their accuracy in other details, but we have no detailed contemporary English sources, so to make any attempt to reconstruct the battle it is necessary to use the saga sources, albeit cautiously.

According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the first military action of 1066 was the arrival of Tostig in the Isle of Wight, with a small fleet from Flanders. He was able to secure both money and provisions, almost certainly as a pay-off in return for peace in the manner of earlier Viking raids. He then raided along the south coast of England until he reached Sandwich in Kent, which was one of the bases for the English fleet. From there he took some of the *butsecarls* (boatmen) with him, 'some willingly, some unwillingly' (Swanton 1996: 196). These were the mercenary crews of the fleet, and were probably from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, including but not limited to Anglo-

Harald Hard-Counsel

Harald Hardrada (Hard-Counsel) had been king of Norway for nearly 20 years by the time of Stamford Bridge, and had an extensive military career both before and after he became king. As the son of a king he would have received military training as a child, and he was forced into exile following the conquest of Norway by Cnut of Denmark in 1028, although he fought alongside his half-brother Olaf to resist Cnut. In exile he served as a commander within the household troops of Prince Jaroslav of Novgorod and Kiev, before going on to fight in the Byzantine army. He served as a *spatharokandidatos* (a mid-ranking officer) in the Varangian Guard, a unit of auxiliary troops raised from outside the Byzantine Empire, who doubled as shock troops for battle and sometimes also as guards for the emperor, as their status as outsiders made them less likely to be involved in internal factional politics.

Later Scandinavian sources exaggerate Harald's importance in Byzantium, both in the army and the court, but his experience there meant that he probably had greater formal training in tactics and strategy than typical Viking leaders. Harald was famed for his cunning, but most of the stratagems attributed to him in the sagas were probably borrowed from classical sources rather than being the genuine actions of Harald and his men. Whatever the truth of his time in the East, the

treasure he gained in Byzantium and Russia was enough to buy him joint kingship of Norway in 1046 alongside his nephew Magnus (r. 1035–47), and he became sole ruler of Norway the following year upon the death of Magnus. His failure to achieve a decisive victory in repeated wars in Denmark throughout the rest of his reign suggests that his skills as a commander may have been exaggerated, but he was also famed for his size and his prowess as a warrior. Later saga tradition links him with a raven banner, something also attributed to other Viking leaders. While this may simply have been a symbol of leadership, the use of banners to convey signals on the battlefield cannot be excluded.

It is unclear why Harald was at Stamford Bridge on 25 September 1066. It lies along a Roman road to the east of York, but Harald's fleet was to the south, at Riccall, and Stamford Bridge was certainly not an obvious route to York itself. The intention was apparently to receive a further submission from the men of Yorkshire, and to take hostages for good behaviour, but there may also have been an intention to re-provision from the area to the east of York, since a large fleet would quickly deplete the resources immediately around Riccall, and a few days had already passed since the submission and supply of provisions at York itself.

Saxons and Vikings. According to John of Worcester he was also joined by a small fleet from Orkney, which would suggest that his alliance with Harald Hard-Counsel of Norway was already in place. Tostig sailed up the east coast to the Humber, now with 60 ships, and from there raided south into Lindsey. He was defeated there, however, by a land army led by Edwin of Mercia (and, according to one manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Morcar of Northumbria) and driven from the land. The *butsecarls* now largely



Silver penny of Harald Hard-Counsel, minted at Odense in Denmark. Harald had briefly ruled in Denmark, although the coin gives him the title REX NAR (King of Norway), but his ambitions in Denmark were ultimately unsuccessful, and it was after he made peace in Denmark and abandoned his claims there that he turned his attention to England. (Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo; photograph: Lill-Ann Chepstow-Lusty)



A silver penny of Harold II, minted in 1066, showing the obverse side. Having been present at Edward's deathbed, he was able to claim that Edward had expressed the wish that Harold should succeed him. Whether or not this claim was true, Harold was chosen as king by the *witan* (assembly), and crowned, and could thus claim his reign to be entirely legitimate. Certainly this position gave him control of the machinery of kingship, including the right to summon the *fyrð*. While the preparation of Duke William II of Normandy's fleet, graphically portrayed on the Bayeux Tapestry, left no doubt as to the duke's intentions to English spies even if he had not openly declared them, the long history of warfare between Denmark and Norway meant that the mustering of a fleet by Harald Hard-Counsel might have attracted less attention than it deserved. Whatever Harold did or did not know, he saw William as the main threat, and he based himself on the south coast of England, with both an army and a fleet, in anticipation of the expected Norman invasion. Manuscript D of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* appears to indicate that Harold's fleet saw action against William in the course of the summer of 1066, but bad weather delayed William's crossing until the autumn. (Photo by CM Dixon/Print Collector/Getty Images)

abandoned him, and it was with only 12 ships that he fled north to Scotland, where 'the king of the Scots gave him safe conduct and helped him with provisions -and [he] stayed there all summer' (Swanton 1996: 196).

Meanwhile, Tostig's brother Harold II mustered a fleet first at Sandwich and then at the Isle of Wight, as well as mustering elements of the *fyrð* along the south coast in preparation for the expected invasion by William, but was forced to disband these forces by 8 September as adverse weather conditions meant that William did not attempt the crossing. Around the same time, however, Harald Hard-Counsel arrived in Scotland with a fleet from Norway, reinforced by the earls of Orkney, and met up with Tostig. Different accounts give Harald between 180 and 300 ships, and Tostig 12. From there they sailed south, according to the sagas landing first in Cleveland, 'taking hostages and tribute and went on south to Scarborough, overcame it with fire, and subdued all the north country under him' (Finlay 2004: 221). Harald is then credited by *Heimskringla* (a history of the kings of Norway) with defeating another force in Holderness. Although English sources do not mention these initial attacks, it must have been at this point that word was carried south to Harold II, as he heard of Harald's arrival just after he had disbanded his own fleet: 'Then he went northward, by day and night, as quickly as he could gather his army' (Swanton 1996: 196).

English and Scandinavian sources agree that Harald and Tostig continued south into the Humber, then up the River Ouse to near York. Then, according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 'Earl Edwin and Earl Morcar had gathered from their earldom as great a force as they could get, and fought with that raiding army and made a great slaughter; and there many of the English people were killed and drowned and driven in flight; and the Norwegians had possession of the place of slaughter' (Swanton 1996: 196). This largely agrees with the slightly longer saga accounts, which place the battle between the river and 'a certain ditch' (Finlay 2004: 222), and also indicate a major victory for the Norwegians, with many English killed, but some escaping along the river. The sagas replace Edwin of Mercia with Waltheof of Huntingdon as one of the English leaders, however, and wrongly state that Morcar was killed. English and Scandinavian sources agree that this battle took place on the eve of St Matthew's Day, and thus on 20 September, while Harold II was still engaged in his forced march north. Neither the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* nor the sagas indicate where any of this took place, other than that it was near York, but English chroniclers of the 12th century indicate that Harald's fleet was anchored at Riccall, and that the battle itself took place at Fulford, just outside York. This location fits the topography described in the saga sources. The battle of Fulford appears to have been a comprehensive victory for Harald, and one which wiped out the *fyrð* of northern England as an effective force. There is no doubt, however, that Harald's own force would have been depleted by casualties incurred in the battle.

English and saga sources agree that following the battle of Fulford, Harald received the submission of York and planned to make a more lasting peace



The reconstructed Viking longship *Havhingsten fra Glendalough* sails through the Limfjorden in northern Jutland on 3 August 2008 after its journey across the North Sea. The ship, a reconstruction of a 30m-long warship built in Dublin in 1042, was on its way back to the Viking Museum in the town of Roskilde where it was built as a reconstruction of the *Skuldelev 2* wreck, which was excavated in Roskilde Fjord. By the time of Stamford Bridge the largest Viking ships could carry crews of up to 100 men, although the majority of ships were probably somewhat smaller. There is no consensus on the size of Harald's fleet; different sources vary between 180 and 600 ships. Even at the lower end, this suggests an invasion force of up to 10,000 men, and the total may well have been considerably higher. The apparent ease with which they crushed the combined forces of Northumbria and Mercia at Fulford also implies a substantial force, but Harald's force would have been depleted by losses at Fulford, while part of the force remained with the ships at Riccall; and although some reinforcements from Riccall apparently joined the battle at Stamford Bridge, they did so after the main battle was over. It is therefore unlikely that Harald's army at Stamford Bridge came close at any point to the full strength with which he arrived in England, but it still numbered in the thousands. (HENNING BAGGER/AFP/Getty Images)

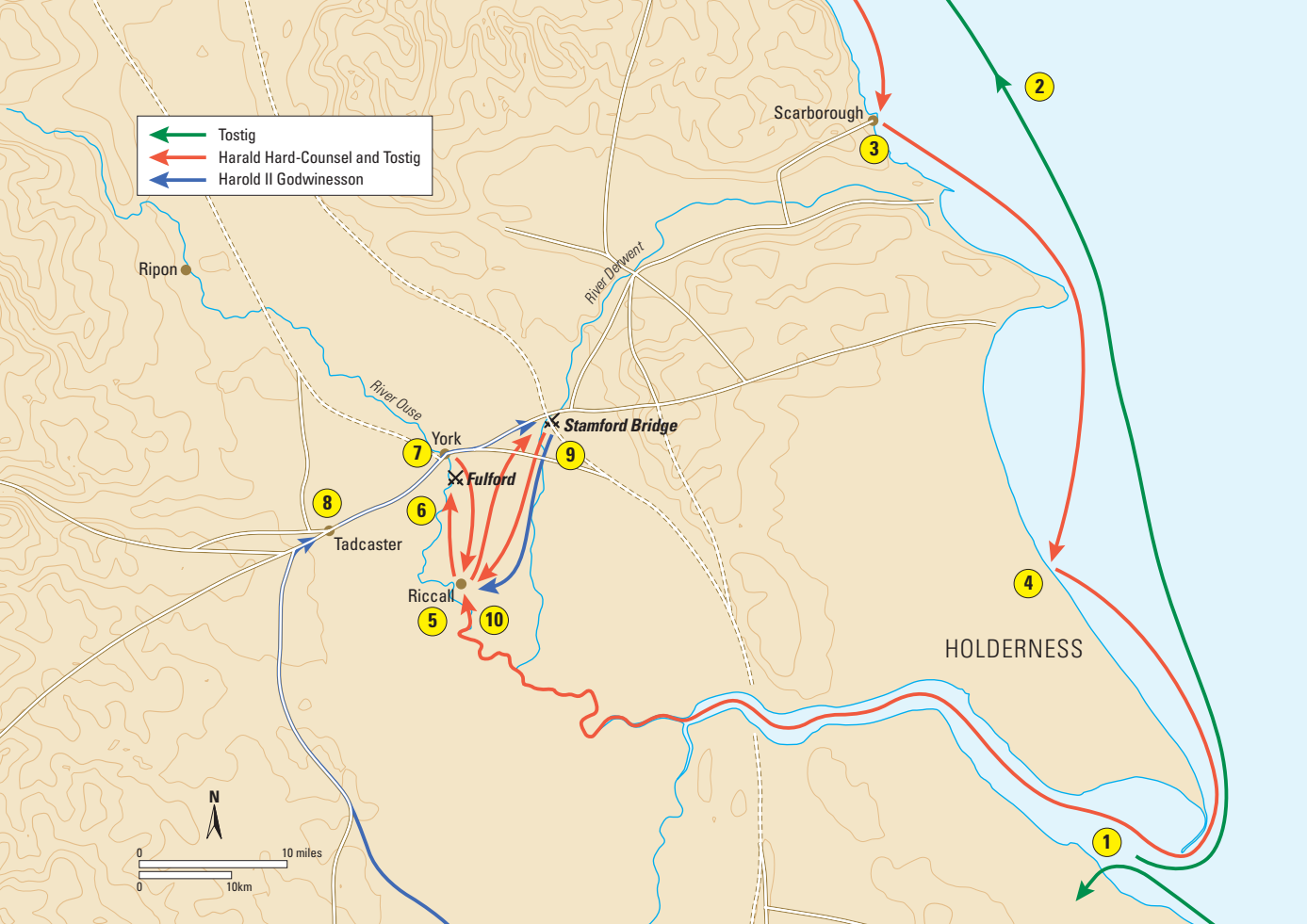
with the leading men of the area, and Harald and Tostig returned to their ships. Meanwhile, Harold's army was approaching from the south, reaching Tadcaster by 24 September. On the 25th he continued through York, and reached Stamford Bridge, where he caught Harald and Tostig apparently completely by surprise, according to both English and Scandinavian sources. Harald was apparently there with only part of his army, having left part at the ships. According to the saga accounts, since he was not expecting a battle and the weather was hot, most of the men had left their armour at the ships, although they had their weapons.

The Stamford Bridge campaign, 1066

MAP KEY

- 1 Spring or early summer:** Tostig arrives in the Humber with a mercenary fleet, possibly reinforced by a fleet from Orkney. He raids south into Lindsey, but is defeated in battle by Edwin, earl of Mercia, following which he is abandoned by much of his fleet. He takes refuge with the king of Scots, and spends the summer with him.
- 2 End of August:** Tostig's reduced fleet heads north to Cleveland to join Harald Hard-Counsel's substantial fleet of 180–300 ships, including those of the earls of Orkney. Harald takes hostages and tribute.
- 3 Early September:** Harald's forces attack Scarborough, and overcome it with fire.
- 4 Early September:** Harald's forces land at an unspecified place in the Holderness area, and defeat a local force. At about the same time in London, Harold II learns of Harald's invasion and musters his forces to ride north by day and night.
- 5 19 September:** By this date, Harald's fleet has sailed south into the Humber, then up the River Ouse to Riccall, south of York.
- 6 20 September:** Harald and Tostig are met at Fulford by an army under the command of Edwin, earl of Mercia, and his brother Morcar, earl of Northumbria. The two brothers are comprehensively defeated, and retreat with the remainder of their forces.
- 7 After 20 September:** Harald advances to York, which submits. He and his forces return to their ships at Riccall, having arranged for a further submission some days later.
- 8 24 September:** Harold II's army reaches Tadcaster.
- 9 25 September:** Harald and Tostig lead a part of their force, without full armour, to Stamford Bridge, east of York. Harold II's force moves through York and catches the Viking army by surprise. The Vikings retreat beyond the River Derwent, supposedly leaving the bridge defended by a single individual to halt the English advance. The Vikings form a shield-wall, probably taking advantage of the slightly higher ground a short distance back from the river. Messengers are sent to Riccall for reinforcements. The English army crosses the river, and unsuccessfully tries to persuade the Vikings to withdraw, and Tostig to change sides. The Anglo-Saxons then assault the Viking shield-wall, and Harald Hard-Counsel is killed, possibly by an arrow to the throat. Tostig takes command of the Viking army; after another failed attempt at diplomacy, the English assault is renewed and Tostig is killed. Viking reinforcements arrive from Riccall, led by Eystein Orri, who is duly killed. The remnants of the Viking army are put to flight; some are hunted down, while the remainder are pursued back to the ships at Riccall.
- 10 After 25 September:** Harold II negotiates a peace at Riccall with Olaf, son of Harald Hard-Counsel, whereby Olaf and the other survivors are permitted to depart safely in 24 ships, in return for a promise of lasting peace.





Battlefield environment

The battle site was to the east of the River Derwent, where the Roman road crossed the river. The bridge across the river was apparently narrow enough to be easily defended. The river itself is also relatively narrow at this point, but steep-sided, and sufficiently deep and fast-moving to be difficult to ford, especially in the face of opposition. In the case of fording and attempting to clamber up the banks, armour would be a liability

rather than an asset. The river is narrow enough that either side would easily be in bow range of the other, and anyone attempting to cross would quickly fall within the effective range for throwing spears and axes. It was thus difficult to cross anywhere but the bridge, and the bridge itself provided a choke point. Once beyond it, a gradual rise offered some advantage to the Viking defenders, but not a great one.

OPPOSITE

Stamford Bridge, North Yorkshire. The exact location of the bridge in 1066 is uncertain, but from the line of the road it is likely that it was close to the modern bridge. Although the name Stamford indicates that there was or had been a ford here, the steep banks of the river show how hard it would be to cross the river in the face of opposition, and why the defence of the bridge itself at the beginning of the battle was so important. (Author's Collection)

INTO COMBAT

The majority of Harald's army at Stamford Bridge had come with him from Norway, and was in character somewhere between a national army and a traditional Viking war band on a larger scale. The army was a mixture of the personal *lið* of Harald himself, and those of his leading chieftains, probably reinforced by a significant component of the *leiðangr* levy, and also by adventurers who had joined the expedition in the manner of earlier Viking fleets, attaching themselves to the force of an established leader in the hope of gain. Harald had gathered reinforcements on the way from the earldom of Orkney, which had been settled by Norwegian Vikings in the late 9th century, and was claimed with varying degrees of success by the kings of Norway. It was also an important power in its own right, particularly at sea, and at times in the 11th century parts of the Scottish mainland as well as the Northern and Western Isles fell under the rule of the earls of Orkney. We are told that the earls of Orkney (presumably with their men) were among those left to guard the ships. Given the long-running war between Norway and Denmark, it is likely that most if not all of these men had previous combat experience, even without their involvement at Fulford five days earlier. Harald's ally Tostig had a fleet of 60 ships, comprising both English followers and mercenaries gathered in Flanders, which was ruled by Tostig's father-in-law.

OPPOSITE

Anglo-Saxon sword from the River Witham, near Lincoln. The weight of the sword meant that it was primarily a cutting weapon, and this required a more open space than the *seax* to use effectively. Swords also came in various shapes and sizes, although only single-handed swords were used in this period. In the later Anglo-Saxon period swords were often relatively long and narrow, making them better balanced and faster in the hand than a shorter, broader blade, but with less cutting power. The amount of iron required for a sword meant that even a simply decorated example was an expensive item, and it is uncertain that all members of the *fyrð* would have carried one. There is considerable variation in the amount of decoration on both blade and hilt, however. Most blades were made of a single piece of metal, but pattern-welded blades (made of multiple bars twisted and hammered for decorative effect) and inscribed blades were also known, while hilt fittings could be decorated in gold, silver or copper alloy. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

The English army at Stamford Bridge would have been a mixture of the household troops of Harold II and his leading nobles, together with the levied *fyrð* drawn from the landed warrior class of much of south-east England and perhaps also the south Midlands, probably reinforced with some of the survivors of the Mercian and Northumbrian *fyrð* who had fought at Fulford. The relative peace of England under Edward the Confessor probably meant that many of these men would have had military training, but no real combat experience, although some would have been involved in minor internal conflicts in the preceding years, and some would have been veterans of wars on the Welsh borders during Edward's reign. Rather than a straightforward battle between Anglo-Saxon and Viking, Stamford Bridge was thus a battle between a force of Anglo-Saxons on the one side (although many of the Anglo-Saxon side, including Harold II Godwinsson, were of mixed Anglo-Saxon and Viking blood) and a mixed force including both Anglo-Saxons and Vikings on the other – although, as we have seen, ethnic diversity and multiple leaders had also been a feature of earlier Viking armies.

There is no way to estimate reliably the numbers involved, but while there were probably some thousands of men on either side, the combination of factors probably means that the Vikings faced a numerical disadvantage, and possibly a significant one. The victory at Fulford may well have given a boost to the Vikings' morale, but also meant that their overall numbers were depleted by casualties, in addition to which Harald's force was divided between those at Stamford Bridge and those at Riccall. The Viking army at Stamford Bridge had fought a battle only a few days before, and had apparently travelled some miles from Riccall either that day or the day before. The Anglo-Saxons had undertaken a forced march up from the south of England, and had already travelled several miles from Tadcaster to Stamford Bridge that day. Even allowing for the fact that this journey from the south

was probably made on horseback rather than on foot, it must have taken several days, so both sides would have been tired before the battle started. If the sagas are to be believed, the Vikings had the disadvantage from the point of view of protection of fighting without mail, but since we are told that a major reason for this was the heat, the added protection of mail for the English would have been partially balanced by the impact of the added heat and weight on already tired bodies.

Why did Harald not focus his defence on the bridge across the River Derwent itself? We are told that initially, a single Norwegian was able to prevent the English from crossing the bridge, and by simply replacing that individual with others, it would have been possible to slow the English attack considerably. There are parallels with the causeway at Maldon in that the bridge provided a significant barrier to the enemy's advance, which was apparently abandoned after contesting it for a relatively short time. A stronger delaying action at the bridge would have permitted the retreat of Harald's main force towards Riccall, to regroup and rearm. Given the depleted state of his troops, and the tradition that they were largely without their armour, retreat would have been prudent, and according to the saga tradition, Tostig urged Harald to do so, but Harald refused. Failing that, a more determined defence of the bridge could at least have increased the chance of reinforcements from Riccall arriving in time to influence the course of the battle. Instead, Harald chose to fight a pitched battle on ground that offered no great advantage, apparently against superior numbers, and with many of his troops unarmoured. Either Harald was overconfident in the wake of his previous victory, or fear of appearing cowardly made him determined to fight despite the odds being against him, but it is hard to see his willingness to yield the advantage offered by the bridge as anything other than an excessive pride far worse than that of which Byrhtnoth has been accused at Maldon, and without the strategic justification that can be applied to Byrhtnoth's decision.

Combining the English and Scandinavian sources, the battle seems to fall into five phases, interspersed by bouts of diplomacy. The first is the only element to be recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, although as a later addition in the 12th century to a single manuscript of it. According to this,

There was one of the Norwegians who withstood the English people so that they could not cross the bridge nor gain victory. Then one Englishman shot with an arrow but it was to no avail, and then another came under the bridge and stabbed him through under the mail coat. Then Harold, king of the English, came over the bridge and his army along with him. (Swanton 1996: 198)

The steep banks of the river make the idea of somebody attacking from under the bridge unlikely, and this detail may have been added for dramatic effect; the same may apply to the statement that it was a single Norwegian rather than a small group, but the main battle does seem to have been fought on the Viking side of the river rather than on the bridge itself. The reference to archery at this point is plausible, and both sides probably used missile weapons to support this phase of combat on the bridge. It was probably during this phase that Harald, according to the sagas, sent riders to Riccall to







The fight for the bridge



Anglo-Saxon view: Anglo-Saxons are assaulting the bridge across the River Derwent at Stamford Bridge in the first phase of the battle. The Anglo-Saxon *fyrð* is a mixture of the household troops of the king and his leading followers, and levies from the south of England. Many are well-armed, and protected with mail shirts and helmets, but some of the levy troops are more lightly armed. The bridge is held by a single armoured Viking warrior, fighting with a two-handed axe, who has already killed or wounded the first few men sent against him. Because he is proving difficult to remove through hand-to-hand combat, one

of the Anglo-Saxons is preparing to throw a spear at him, as the absence of a shield makes the Viking vulnerable to missile weapons. A small shield-wall has been formed immediately behind the bridge, but the bulk of the Viking army is visible in the background, where they are forming a shield-wall on the higher ground a little way back from the river. Just in front of this can be seen the exceptionally tall figure of Harald Hard-Counsel, king of Norway, with his raven banner behind him. Harald is sending a mounted messenger to summon reinforcements from the Viking fleet at Riccall.



Viking view: A small Viking shield-wall has formed up behind the bridge across the River Derwent, providing support and encouragement for one of their number who is defending the bridge. Although the warrior defending the bridge is in mail, most of his companions are not. They were not expecting battle today, and the weather is hot, so most have left their mail at the ships. Even so, since they are in hostile territory they have been cautious enough to wear padded under-armor and helmets. Among them are archers and spear-throwers who are hoping to disrupt the Anglo-Saxon advance with missiles. Across the river, the English

vanguard has already begun its assault on the bridge, although the first few to attack have been killed or badly wounded by the two-handed axe wielded by the defender of the bridge. Most are well-armed, but as they are drawn from a number of different households their equipment varies. Some carry traditional round shields, while others have the newer kite shield, which offers better protection for the legs, and one is armed with a large two-handed axe similar to that being wielded by the Viking warrior on the bridge. Behind the bridge the bulk of the English army is advancing along the old Roman road from York.

fetch reinforcements, but it is unlikely that these could then have arrived in less than four hours, allowing for travel in both directions, and the necessity for the reinforcements to arm themselves.

For most of the rest of the battle we are reliant on later saga traditions. As noted, there are definite factual errors in some elements of the saga accounts, and this means that they cannot be regarded as reliable in other respects. In particular, they also state that the Anglo-Saxons fought as cavalry, and that the Vikings from within their shield-wall defended against the cavalry with halberds. This does not correspond with the general lack of evidence for Anglo-Saxon cavalry in this period, while the use of halberds in this period is certainly anachronistic. This has been interpreted by most scholars either as an account of another battle borrowed by mistake, or as a broader anachronism based on developments in warfare by the time that the sagas were compiled over 150 years later. Although there have been some recent attempts to argue that the account of this part of the battle is authentic, they are not convincing. Likewise we must be wary of the words put into the mouths of Harald and Tostig, since it is unlikely that many people who could have heard them survived to tell the tale. Only the bare outline of the saga events is therefore accepted here, and even that may not be accurate, although it is not implausible.

First, there was an unsuccessful attempt at diplomacy, aimed at separating Tostig from Harald Hard-Counsel. Tostig was supposedly offered pardon and the restoration of his earldom of Northumbria, while Harald was offered only 'seven feet' of England, or as much more as he was taller than most men. The details may be suspect, but the idea that Harold II might seek reconciliation with his brother is not implausible, nor is the idea that he should seek to bring part of the Viking force over to his own side. In any case, if such an attempt was made, it was unsuccessful.

This was followed by the English assault on the Norwegian shield-wall. We are told that the edges of this were curled back so that the shield-wall formed a circle, rather than a straight line. This is described in the context of the supposed English cavalry attack, and is therefore suspect, but it is not impossible. If the English numbers were significantly greater, it would be relatively straightforward to engage the Norwegian shield-wall fully, while sending additional troops around the flanks and rear. A circular formation, like the infantry square of the 18th and 19th centuries, meant that the Norwegians would be defended from every direction. This phase saw a combination of hand-to-hand combat and the use of missiles, and Harald Hard-Counsel is said to have been killed by an arrow to the throat. It has been argued by some that this is an element of confusion with the death of Harold II at Hastings a few weeks later, but contemporary accounts of Hastings do not support this version of Harold's death, and the famous image on the Bayeux Tapestry has been convincingly argued to be the product of later restoration rather than part of the original design. The earliest references to Harold II at Hastings being killed with an arrow date from the mid-12th century, and could just as easily be borrowed from the death of Harald Hard-Counsel at Stamford Bridge as the other way around.

According to the sagas, Tostig then took command. There was a pause for another failed attempt at diplomacy between the two brothers, followed by another assault on the Viking shield-wall, and Tostig was killed.

Late 10th-century sword. The blade is from Skoven, Lesjeskogen, Norway, and is combined with hilt fittings apparently originally from another sword, possibly from Korsgården Ånsnes, Hedemark, Norway. The broad blade would be more cumbersome to fight with than some slimmer weapons, but could inflict heavier blows. (Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo; photograph: Eirik Irgens Johnsen)



In the third phase, reinforcements arrived from Riccall under Eystein Orri, who was the prospective son-in-law of Harald Hard-Counsel. Having had the chance to arm before the battle, they were able to face the Anglo-Saxons on more equal terms, and were initially successful. However, they then supposedly followed the example of their comrades and removed their armour because of the heat, and were quickly killed. This last point seems somewhat difficult to believe, especially since the supposed heat of the day would have been equally problematic for the English, and it seems likely that this repetition of the idea that the Vikings were defeated because they removed their armour is a literary motif rather than a genuine account.

If armour was removed at this point, however, it may relate not to the arrival of reinforcements but to flight once the battle was lost, with some of those fleeing ridding themselves of armour in order to run faster. According to the saga tradition, this phase of the battle, known as 'Orri's storm' (Finlay 2004: 231), was the end of the actual battle, but the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records that following the deaths of Harald Hard-Counsel and Tostig,

the Northmen who remained were put to flight, and the English fiercely attacked them from behind until some of them came to ship, some drowned and some also burnt, and thus variously perished, so that there were few survivors and the English had possession of the place of slaughter. The king then gave safe conduct to Olaf, the son of the king of the Norse, and to their bishop, and to the earl of Orkney, and to all of those who were left on the ships. And they then went up to our king, and swore oaths that they would always keep peace and friendship in this land and the king let them go home with 24 ships. (Swanton 1996: 199)

The reference to some of the defeated Vikings being burnt may indicate that they took refuge in buildings and were burnt out, and the apparent ferocity of the pursuit and small number of survivors stands in contrast to the ease with which defeated armies in the campaign of 871 had apparently been able to fight again on relatively equal terms within days. This may reflect in part the strategic necessity for Harold II to ensure that the enemy was irrevocably crushed before moving south to face the Norman invasion, but it may also have been an unprompted response from the Anglo-Saxon troops, seeking revenge for Fulford, or relieving the tensions and frustrations of the hard journey north.

What does seem clear is that the outcome of the battle was very one-sided, and rather more so than many battles. That may reflect the advantage of numbers and supposedly of armour, but as with Ashdown and Maldon, the death of the leaders may have had a major impact on the willingness and ability of the losing side to fight effectively. There is nothing to suggest the use of clever tactics or strategies on either side, just a straightforward clash of shield-walls, which the English won decisively. Even so, although both English and Scandinavian sources emphasize the high death rate on the Viking side, the battle would have resulted in considerable casualties for the English army. For all that Stamford Bridge was a massive and conclusive victory for Harold II, it was one that probably cost him dear at Hastings less than three weeks later.

Analysis

Ultimately, there seems little to choose between the Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings on the battlefield. Although the two sides have developed very different reputations in later history, they fought with very similar weapons and armour, borrowing developments from each other over time, most notably the large double-handed axe used by both sides in 1066, but apparently adopted by the Anglo-Saxons under Viking influence around the beginning of the 11th century. What little evidence we have for battle tactics also suggests a similar approach, with the shield-wall as the only major battlefield formation on either side, and with various tactics adopted by either side to break the cohesion of the shield-wall.

The events of 871 show how easily victory could swing from one side to the other, with two recorded victories for the West Saxons and four for the Vikings, together with three more major battles for which no details or outcome are recorded, but none of these battles were truly decisive, despite the glowing terms in which the Anglo-Saxon victory at Ashdown was recorded. It was only when the West Saxons 'made peace with the Vikings on condition that they would leave them' (Keynes & Lapidge 1983: 81), almost certainly a euphemism for paying the Vikings to go away, that matters were settled, at least temporarily. Even then, the Vikings were able to return five years later, forcing Alfred into hiding before his more decisive victory at Edington in 878, and following that victory it was only a diplomatic solution which left Alfred in control of his own territories and the Viking leader Guthrum in control of East Anglia that brought peace between the two sides. In the

Conical helmet, made of four separate plates. The helmet appears to be of early medieval date, and when it first came to academic attention had an old label with it stating that it had been found in the River Derwent near Stamford Bridge. Further investigations have been unable to confirm or refute this provenance. (Nicholas Reeves)



same way, repeated battles between the Anglo-Saxon Edmund II Ironside and the Danish Cnut in 1016 failed to produce a decisive outcome. The two kings subsequently agreed to divide England between them rather than continue fighting, and it was only Edmund's death shortly afterwards that led to Cnut's uncontested recognition as king of England.

Similarly, the Anglo-Saxon victory at Stamford Bridge in 1066 immediately followed the Viking victory at Fulford. If the Vikings had not been caught almost completely by surprise, Stamford Bridge might have been as indecisive as the battles of 871 or 1016, and if the Norman invasion had not been prevented by bad weather from arriving a few weeks earlier as planned, it is by no means implausible that either William II of Normandy or Harold II of England would have reached an accommodation with Harald Hard-Counsel that left the latter in control of Northumbria.

The decisive factors in battle seem to have been a combination of circumstances, leadership, and a strong element of luck. One of the interesting aspects about many of the battles and campaigns mentioned in this book is the youth and relative inexperience of the leaders involved. Alfred was only 21 years old when he played a decisive part in the battle of Ashdown in 871, and his brother and commander Æthelred I was only a few years older. The success of Alfred's tactic of attacking uphill against superior numbers, combined with the knowledge of his later victories, makes it very easy to view this with hindsight as the first of Alfred's great victories; and his charisma as a leader may well have contributed to the success of that manoeuvre. If the attack had failed, however, history's view of such a risky tactic would probably be more damning. If Olaf Tryggvasson was indeed one of the Viking leaders at Maldon in 991, he was also relatively young and inexperienced, yet he secured the victory despite the enemy apparently holding a stronger position at the beginning of the battle. Cnut may still have been a teenager at the time of his conquest of England in 1016, and the knowledge that such youthful successes were possible may have inspired the young and inexperienced Edwin of Mercia and his brother Morcar of Northumbria at Fulford in 1066.

At the same time, age and experience did not guarantee victory. *Ealdorman* Byrhtnoth was an experienced leader at the time of the battle of Maldon, although his seniority in Anglo-Saxon politics at the time does not necessarily indicate significant military experience. His decision to allow the Vikings uncontested access to the mainland at Maldon may have been the right one for the strategic defence of the Essex coast and the Thames Estuary, but it sacrificed tactical control of the battlefield. There is no doubt that Harald Hard-Counsel was an experienced military leader, and a warrior of great personal repute, but both English and Scandinavian sources suggest that he failed to exercise even a basic level of caution in the extent to which he was caught by surprise at Stamford Bridge and insisted on fighting under such negative conditions rather than retreating. For all his reputation in saga literature as a great warrior, Harald had come to England having failed to assert his authority in Denmark in a campaign lasting many years, although his nephew Magnus had enjoyed rather greater success there.

The death of Byrhtnoth at Maldon, and of both Harald Hard-Counsel and his ally Tostig at Stamford Bridge may also have been decisive factors in those battles, as may have been the deaths of one Viking king and five

Viking *jarls* at Ashdown in 871. A lack of flexibility and adaptability on the battlefield meant that the death or flight of a leader in battle usually resulted in defeat for the relevant side.

If the Vikings lacked outstanding success on the battlefield, they deserve more credit than they have normally been given for their grasp of strategy and logistics. Their ability to campaign for years on end in hostile territory was unmatched in western Europe at the time, while the combination of fleets for carrying capacity and horses for speed meant that they were exceptionally mobile. The use of both fortified camps and natural features to defend their forces was key to their long-term campaigning, as it allowed them a focus for gathering and protecting supplies, while also providing a defence when overmatched in the field. That combination of strategic mobility and effective development of bases and supply lines was key to their success in 871, when the West Saxons were unable to dislodge them from their base at Reading, allowing them to regroup at least twice after defeats, and eventually to penetrate deep into Wessex and to extract a peace agreement. The Maldon campaign was similar, striking in quick succession at a number of points in south-east England before any effective defence could be mounted, and using the natural defences of Northey Island as an improvised fortification when they met resistance at Maldon. Both at Reading and at Northey Island, the Vikings emerged from those defences only on their own terms, even if events did not always go as they planned, as at Ashdown. Harald Hard-Counsel's decision to bring his ships up the River Ouse in 1066 offered a similar potential to support his campaign against York, but his decision to move off in a different direction after his victory at Fulford, and not to retreat to the ships when faced with a superior force at Stamford Bridge, meant that the potential advantages offered by this strategy would be wasted by poor decisions.

FAR LEFT

A 10th-century sword from Dybäck, Sweden. This is one of the finest surviving swords from the Viking Age, but opinion remains divided as to whether it is Anglo-Saxon or Viking workmanship. The shape of the pommel and upper and lower guards is typical of late Anglo-Saxon swords, but appears also to have been copied by the Vikings. On this example the decoration of the hilt and scabbard fittings is also either English or heavily influenced by English art styles. (Photo by CM Dixon/Print Collector/Getty Images)



LEFT

Modern reconstruction of the Dybäck sword. The reconstruction shows more clearly than the original the relationship between the sword hilt and the top-mount of the scabbard. The scabbard is made of wood, lined with cloth or wool, and covered with leather, but these organic materials rarely survive in the ground, meaning that only the metal top-mounts and chapes tend to survive. (Author's Collection)

An iron axe-head of the 10th–11th centuries. It is a widespread type, from Normandy to Finland, and appears to be of the type featured in the Bayeux Tapestry. An axe, whether single-handed or double-handed, required space to use effectively, although even a large double-handed axe could be used to make a vertical cut from the rear rank of a shield-wall. Axes were apparently relatively rare in late Anglo-Saxon warfare, but from the late 10th or early 11th centuries double-handed axes with large heads were used as a result of Viking influence. These are shown on the Bayeux Tapestry as being used at Hastings in 1066, so there is no reason to doubt that some members of the English army at Stamford Bridge would also have had them. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)



The Anglo-Saxon army was also well organized in many ways. The fact that Æthelred I and Alfred were repeatedly able to muster forces to oppose the *micel here* in 871 speaks highly of both the power of the king in Wessex, and the underlying structures of recruitment and mobilization, and these were strengthened further by Alfred later in his reign. Although the fact that Alfred was forced to ‘make peace’ with the *micel here* is on one level an anti-climax after the celebrated victory at Ashdown, it was a significantly greater achievement than any of his contemporaries in Northumbria, East Anglia and Mercia, all of which were conquered by the *micel here* in the course of the 860s and 870s. Alfred’s reforms laid the foundations of military organization in late Anglo-Saxon England, and although that was unable to function at its best under the weak kingship of Æthelred II, it showed what it could do under strong leadership in 1066. Harold II’s ability to move an army from the south of England to Yorkshire, fight a major battle, return to the south coast and fight another major battle was a major achievement, irrespective of the final outcome, and leaving aside the much debated question of whether he was in fact correct to offer battle to William when he did. Unfortunately, in terms of the reputation of both Harold and the Anglo-Saxon army, the ultimate legacy of their achievements in 1066 was their defeat at Hastings rather than their victory at Stamford Bridge.

In many ways this fits into a wider perception of the Anglo-Saxons as consistently second-best in warfare. They were unable to prevent the Viking conquest of much of England in the late 9th century, nor the taking of *gelds* and the subsequent Danish conquest of the whole kingdom in the late 10th and early 11th centuries, nor ultimately were they able to prevent the Norman Conquest of 1066. Such a perception is slightly but not completely unfair. Alfred defeated repeated waves of Viking attacks on Wessex, and his military reforms laid the foundations for his successors to conquer the other former Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and create a unified kingdom of England. Under his great-grandson Edgar, this was a strong and wealthy kingdom, and it was only the fact that he was succeeded by two successive children that caused it to collapse so dramatically. Even the reign of Edward the Confessor, not himself a strong king, saw military success against the Welsh and the Scots, while Stamford Bridge was a resounding victory. Even Hastings was a close-run battle, and might easily have gone the other way had William rather than Harold been killed in the fighting.

If perceptions of Anglo-Saxon warfare are sometimes unduly negative, the Vikings by contrast enjoy an exaggerated reputation for success on the battlefield. Their skill, ferocity and capacity for atrocities in battle have all been overplayed in comparison to their contemporaries. It is true that they saw repeated periods of success against the Anglo-Saxons in the late 9th century, in the immediate aftermath of the death of Æthelstan in 939, during the reign of Æthelred II, and at Fulford in 1066. Nevertheless, these successes owe less to the wild warriors of romantic imagination, and more to careful strategies and logistical planning, a skilful combination of warfare and diplomacy, and good underlying organization.

Aftermath

Stamford Bridge was severely damaging for both sides. For the Anglo-Saxons it was a clear victory, but one which they could not afford in light of the continued threat from Duke William II of Normandy. The battle of Hastings, less than three weeks after Stamford Bridge, was a hard-fought battle, which only turned decisively in William's favour late in the day after hours of fighting. The losses suffered at Stamford Bridge, and perhaps also at Fulford – and the exhaustion resulting from the forced journeys to and from Yorkshire – must have impacted on the battle-readiness of the English army at Hastings, irrespective of whether or not it was the decisive factor in the English defeat. Furthermore, Harold's absence in the north must have impacted on his ability to engage directly with the strategic response to



Battle of Hastings, 14 October 1066. The death of Harold II, last Anglo-Saxon king of England. Although the image of 'Harold' with an arrow in his eye is famous, detailed examination of the Bayeux Tapestry suggests that the arrow is a later alteration during restoration, and that originally the figure was holding a spear, matching other figures around the central scene. It is probably the axeman behind, being felled by a horseman, which is intended to represent Harold himself. (Photo by Universal History Archive/Getty Images)



Warriors of the Varangian Guard, from John Scylitzes' *Synopsis of Histories*, 12th century. Following the Norman Conquest, some Anglo-Saxon warriors left England and sought employment elsewhere, notably in the Varangian Guard in Constantinople. This had been formed in the late 10th century as a unit within the Byzantine army initially composed of Vikings from Russia, and followed a long tradition in Rome and Byzantium of using 'barbarian' troops to bolster their native armies. The fact that as foreigners they were less involved with local factional politics meant that they also came to serve as the palace guard. From the late 11th century, therefore, Anglo-Saxons and Vikings served together in this unit. (Public Domain)

William's landing in the build-up to Hastings. With no other experienced leaders of note on the English side, this is also likely to have been significant. It is likely, therefore, that victory at Stamford Bridge cost Harold both his throne and his life.

The impact for the Vikings was even greater. The leaders of the expedition were killed in the battle, and although Harald Hard-Counsel's young son Olaf was able to agree terms for his own escape together with the remaining ships, only a relatively small proportion of the original invasion force apparently survived the two battles. Having been in a position to challenge the power of first Denmark then England, Norwegian military power and ambition were crushed for a generation, and despite his subsequent long reign (1067–93), Olaf III became known as Olaf the Peaceful. The earldom of Orkney also never recovered the power it had apparently enjoyed in northern and western Scotland until shortly before the Stamford Bridge campaign.

This does not mean that Stamford Bridge signalled the end of all Viking raiding in Britain. Svein Estrithsson of Denmark (r. 1047–76) led attacks on northern England in 1069 and 1075, but these were repelled without the need for major battles, and plans for a further Danish invasion in 1086 were abandoned after the king of Denmark was killed by his own followers. Harald Hard-Counsel's grandson Magnus Barelegs (r. 1093–1103) sought to emulate his grandfather, and had some success in Scotland and around the Irish Sea, but died in Ireland without ever having posed a major threat to England. As late as 1263 a Norwegian force perhaps even larger than that of Harald Hard-Counsel was left in possession of the battlefield at Largs in south-western Scotland after an indecisive battle in which only a small proportion of the forces on either side was engaged. The Norwegian fleet was then dispersed by storms, and a lasting peace treaty was established in 1266. A Scandinavian threat to the British Isles therefore persisted for two centuries after Stamford Bridge. Nevertheless, after Stamford Bridge there was never again a major battle between the English and the Vikings.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Medieval sources

Æthelweard's Chronicle was written in the late 10th century by Æthelweard, *ealdorman* of the western provinces and a descendant of Æthelred I. The chronicle is dedicated to Matilda, a distant cousin of Æthelweard and a great-great-granddaughter of Æthelred I's brother Alfred, who also fought in the battle of Ashdown. Æthelweard had access to a version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and often follows it closely, but he frequently provides additional details derived from other unattributed sources. The chronicle contains a year-by-year listing of major events, in varying detail, with some digressions where the author comments on some of the major figures involved.

The Ancient History of the Norwegian Kings is a Latin text written by Theodoricus Monachus (Thorir the Monk) in Norway, probably in Trondheim, between 1177 and 1188. It covers the history of Norway from the late 9th century to 1130. It is briefer than the slightly later sagas, but overlaps with them on many points, and may be one of the sources on which the sagas were based.

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is the name given by modern scholars to a text listing major events in England, with varying degrees of detail, from the beginning of the Anglo-Saxon settlements through to the 12th century. It was originally compiled at King Alfred's court in about 892, although it draws on earlier records, and was continued thereafter. The main text is typically more informed about events in Wessex than in other parts of England, and on occasions the choice of what information to include seems intended to show kings of the West Saxon dynasty in an artificially positive light. It survives in several different manuscripts, however, many of which can be traced to particular places. The amount of detail in each manuscript varies, and in some cases shows other regional biases.

The poem known today as *The Battle of Maldon* was probably written very early in the 11th century, although there is disagreement over the exact dating. The poem describes a battle between Anglo-Saxons and Vikings which is known from other sources to have taken place at Maldon in August 991. The beginning and the end of the poem are missing, and the original author and title are unknown. The poem is one of the most detailed

accounts of a battle to survive from the period, but may in places have been influenced by poetic traditions rather than a wholly accurate record.

Fagrskinna is a collection of sagas about the kings of Norway compiled either in northern Norway, or in Iceland with access to Norwegian sources, in the early 13th century. It draws on some of the same sources as *Heimskringla*, and some passages in the two are identical, while in other cases the two differ in detail, or disagree more fundamentally. The sources used by the anonymous compiler of *Fagrskinna* are unlikely to have been written down before the 12th century, but are based on oral tradition which goes back much further. This includes the use of earlier skaldic verse, which is quoted extensively, and in many cases is attributed to individual poets who were contemporaries, and in some cases eyewitnesses, of the events they described. It is argued by many scholars that the rigid forms of the verse mean that it would have been passed down accurately, and thus constitute a genuinely contemporary source, although the poetic forms also sometimes make the information contained in the verse obscure. The prose text which makes up the bulk of the saga is not contemporary, and although there is some historical core to many of the events described, there are also inaccuracies and anachronisms. It is therefore an important source, but not a wholly reliable one.

Heimskringla is a history of the kings of Norway compiled in Iceland c.1230 by the poet and historian Snorri Sturluson (1178/79–1241), and is the most extensive surviving cycle of kings' sagas. *Heimskringla* begins with the semi-legendary saga of the Yngling dynasty, and continues as a series of self-contained sagas about individual Norwegian kings up to the death of King Eysteinn in 1177. Although accepted uncritically as historical fact by earlier historians, it has been recognized since the mid-20th century that much of the material, for the Viking Age, is not reliable. Like *Fagrskinna*, *Heimskringla* is derived from a mixture of 12th-century written sources, oral tradition and skaldic verse, and contains a mixture of facts, distortions and later anachronisms. It is too important a source for historians to ignore, but it is not always straightforward to establish which information is accurate and which is not.

Asser's *Life of King Alfred* was composed at King Alfred's court by a Welsh monk and scholar who joined Alfred's court as part of a wider programme to promote scholarship. Much of his material overlaps with the relevant sections of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, composed at about the same time in the 890s, but Asser's account is often more detailed, and he also includes incidents from

Alfred's life not mentioned in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Asser was rewarded for his services by being made bishop of Sherborne in Dorset, and his work consistently portrays his patron in the most positive light, sometimes conflicting with other sources. There is a longstanding view that the work is a later forgery, but most scholars accept the work as genuine.

Published works

- Abels, Richard (1988). *Lordship and Military Organisation in Anglo-Saxon England*. London: British Museum.
- Abels, Richard (1998). *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England*. London & New York, NY: Longman.
- Abels, Richard (2003). 'Alfred the Great, the *micel hæden* here and the Viking threat', in Timothy Reuter, ed., *Alfred the Great: Papers from the Eleventh-Centenary Conferences*. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 265–79.
- Brooks, Nicholas (1978). 'England in the ninth century: The Crucible of Defeat', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series 29: 1–20.
- Campbell, Alastair, ed. (1962). *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*. London: Thomas Nelson & Sons.
- Carroll, Jayne, Harrison, Stephen & Williams, Gareth (2014). *The Vikings in Britain and Ireland*. London: British Museum Press.
- Cooper, Janet, ed. (1993). *The Battle of Maldon: Fiction and Fact*. London: Hambledon.
- De Vries, Kelly (1999). *The Norwegian Invasion of England in 1066*. Woodbridge: Boydell.
- Finlay, Alison (2004). *Fagrskinna, a Catalogue of the Kings of Norway. A Translation with Introduction and Notes*. Leiden & Boston, MA: Brill.
- Halsall, Guy (2003). *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450–900*. London & New York, NY: Routledge.
- Higham, Nicholas (1997). *The Death of Anglo-Saxon England*. Stroud: Sutton.
- Hill, Paul (2008). *The Viking Wars of Alfred the Great*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword.

Two memorials to the battle in the heart of the modern village of Stamford Bridge. Although not as famous as the battle of Hastings which followed less than three weeks later, the significance of Stamford Bridge in the overall events of 1066 means that today it remains one of the few well-known battles of the period. The memorials are on the fringes of the likely area for the battlefield, with the main battle slightly to the south and south-east. (Author's Collection)

- Hollander, Lee M. (1964). *Heimskringla. History of the Kings of Norway*. Austin, TX: University of Texas/Anglo-Scandinavian Foundation.
- Hollister, C. Warren (1962). *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Hooper, Nicholas (1984). 'The housecarls in England in the eleventh century', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 7: 161–76.
- Hooper, Nicholas (1989). 'Some Observations on the Navy in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in C. Harper-Bill, C. Holdsworth & J.L. Nelson, eds, *Studies in Medieval History presented to R. Allen Brown*. Woodbridge: Boydell, pp. 203–13.
- Jesch, Judith (2001). *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age. The Vocabulary of Runic Inscriptions and Skaldic Verse*. Woodbridge: Boydell.
- Jones, Charles (2007). *Fulford: The Forgotten Battle of 1066*. Stroud: The History Press.
- Keynes, Simon & Lapidge, Michael, trans. (1983). *Alfred the Great. Asser's Life of King Alfred and other contemporary sources*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Lavelle, Ryan (2008). *Aethelred II, King of the English* (2nd edition). Stroud: The History Press.



- Lavelle, Ryan (2010). *Alfred's Wars: Sources and Interpretations of Anglo-Saxon Warfare in the Viking Age*. Woodbridge: Boydell.
- Lawson, M.K. (1993). *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century*. London & New York, NY: Longman.
- Loe, Louise, Boyle, Angela, Webb, Helen & Score, David (2014). 'Given to the Ground'. *A Viking Age Mass Grave on Ridgeway Hill, Weymouth*. Dorchester: Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society Monograph 22.
- Lund, Niels (1985). 'The armies of Swein Forkbeard and Cnut: *leding* or *lið*?', *Anglo-Saxon England* 16: 105–18.
- Lund, Niels (1996). *Lið, leding og landeværn*. Roskilde: Vikingskipshallen.
- McDougall, David & McDougall, Ian, trans. (1998). *Theodoricus Monachus. The Ancient History of the Norwegian Kings*. London: Viking Society for Northern Research.
- McLeod, Shane (2014). *The Beginning of Scandinavian Settlement in England. The Viking 'Great Army' and Early Settlers, c. 865–900*. Turnhout: Brepols.
- Peddie, John (1999). *Alfred, Warrior King*. Stroud: Sutton.
- Pedersen, Anne (2008). 'Viking weaponry', in Stefan Brink & Neil Price, eds, *The Viking World*. Abingdon: Oxford, pp. 204–11.
- Pedersen, Anne (2015). *Dead Warriors in Living Memory. A Study of Weapon and Equestrian Burials in Viking-Age Denmark, AD 800–1000*. PNM Studies in Archaeology and History Vol. 20:1 (2 vols). Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark.
- Peirce, Ian (2002). *Swords of the Viking Age*. Woodbridge: Boydell.
- Price, Neil (2014). 'Ship-men and Slaughter-wolves: Pirate polities in the Viking Age', in Stefan Amirell & Leos Müller (eds), *Persistent Piracy: Maritime Violence and State-Formation in Global Historical Perspective*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 51–68.
- Raffield, Ben (2016). 'Bands of brothers: a re-appraisal of the Viking Great army and its implications for the colonization of England', *Early Medieval Europe* 24(3): 308–37.
- Scragg, Donald, ed. (1991). *The Battle of Maldon, AD 991*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Stephenson, Ian (2002). *The Anglo-Saxon Shield*. Stroud: Tempus.
- Swanton, Michael, trans. & ed. (1996). *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. London: J.M. Dent.
- Whitelock, Dorothy, ed. (1955). *English Historical Documents, c. 500–1042*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode.
- Williams, Ann (2003). *Æthelred the Unready, the Ill-counselled King*. London & New York, NY: Hambledon & London.
- Williams, Gareth (2002). 'Ship levies in the Viking Age: the methodology of studying military institutions in a semi-historical society', in Anne Nørgård Jørgensen, John Pind, Lars Jørgensen & Birth Clausen, eds, *Maritime Warfare in Northern Europe: Technology, Organisation, Logistics and Administration, 500 BC–1500 AD*, PNM Studies in Archaeology & History Vol. 6. Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark, pp. 293–308.
- Williams, Gareth (2008). 'Viking raiding and warfare', in Stefan Brink & Neil Price, eds, *The Viking World*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 193–203.
- Williams, Gareth (2014). *The Viking Ship*. London: British Museum.
- Williams, Gareth, Pentz, Peter & Wemhoff, Matthias (2014). *Vikings: Life and Legend*. London: British Museum.



The mausoleum of the Anglo-Saxon monastery at Repton, Derbyshire, incorporated into a winter-camp by the *micel here* in 873/74. Modern accounts of the activities of the *micel here* tend to assume that the Vikings' strategic aim from the outset was conquest and settlement. The conquest of Northumbria and East Anglia was followed by the seizure of part of Mercia. The campaign in Wessex in 871 could also have resulted in conquest, but at Ashdown and elsewhere the West Saxons were able to offer them stronger resistance than the other kingdoms. An alternative explanation is that conquest was not the main strategic aim of the *micel here* at all. Viking fleets in Continental Europe show a similar pattern of raiding and over-wintering, and the strategy of the *micel here* can better be interpreted as a continuous cycle of raiding to secure plunder or tribute. (Author's Collection)

INDEX

References to illustrations are shown in **bold**.
References to plates are shown in bold with
caption pages in brackets, e.g. 66–67, (68).

Æthelred I, king of Wessex 14, 30, 32, 40, 45,
72, 74
as military leader 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37,
38, 39, 40
Æthelred II, king of England 14, 26, 27, 43,
45, 48, 51, 56, 74
weakness of leadership 43, 44, 48–49, 50, 55
'making peace' 27, 40, 50, 55
Æthelstan II, king of England 11, 42, 74
Æthelwulf, *ealdorman* of Berkshire 32, 33,
34, 40
Alfred the Great, king of Wessex 6, 30, 34,
40, 41
as military leader/tactician 6, 7, 8–9, 9, 14,
23, 26, 33, 34, 35, 36, 38–39, 40, 42, 45,
71, 72, 74
'making peace' with Vikings 34, 40, 55, 74
Anglo-Saxon army 50
commanders/command of 14–15, 16, 17,
18, 48
recruitment/composition 11, 19, 55
cavalry/mounted infantry forces 22
household troops 8, 15, 16, 17, 18, 32,
36, 38, 45, 54, 55, 64, 66–67, (68)
huscarls ('house-followers') 18
levied forces 15, 18, 26, 28, 32, 37, 45,
55, 64, 66–67, (68)
military service in 8–9, 22–23
mobilization/mobility of 28, 74
Anglo-Saxon fleet 18, 26
Anglo-Saxon kingdoms 4, 6, 7
archery 29, 50, 52–53, (54), 65, 66–67, (68)
bows/longbows 29, 51, 63
armour/mail 10, 10, 12, 13, 16, 17, 28, 52–53,
(54), 65, 66–67, (68), 70, 71
axe-heads 6, 74; axemen 75
axes 5, 6, 28, 63, 74, 75
double-handed 52–53, (54), 66–67, (68), 71,
74; hand-axes 5, 12, 13, 74
Ashdown, battle of (871) 10, 11, 18, 26, 30–34,
33, 34, 35, 36–40, 55, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 79
forces/tactics at 12, 13, 16, 17, 19, 25, 29,
32, 34, 35, 35, 36–40, 72–73
nature of fighting 29, 32, 34, 35, 40, 72–73
battlefield communications 28–29, 40, 59, 62,
66–67, (68)
Bayeux Tapestry 22, 60, 69, 74, 75
Byrhtnoth, *ealdorman* of Essex 15, 22, 27, 45,
46, 47, 48, 49–51, 54, 55, 55, 65, 72
Cleveland, Viking fleet to 60, 62, 63
Cnut, king of Denmark/England 11, 15, 18, 19,
27, 31, 48, 56, 59, 72
coins 27, 32, 51, 51, 59, 60
ealdormen, power/role of 15, 40, 43, 45, 48
earls/nobles, role in battle 8, 9, 15, 18
East Anglia, Viking conquest of 6, 26, 27, 30,
31, 33, 37, 71, 74
Edgar I 'the Peaceable' 6, 26, 42–43, 44, 74
Edington, battle of (878) 6, 26, 71
Edmund II Ironside, king of England 14, 27,
56, 72
Edward the Confessor, king of England 18, 22,
56, 57, 58, 60, 64, 74
Edward the Elder, king of the Anglo-Saxons
8, 42
Edwin, earl of Mercia 27, 57, 58, 59, 60, 62, 72
England
conquest/settlement of 42, 43, 43, 44,
56, 79
as unified kingdom 42, 45, 74

Englefield, battle of (870) 32, 33, 34, 35, 37
English army 64–65, 70, 75
English fleet/ships 58–60
Folkestone, raid on 46, 47, 51
Fulford, battle of 27, 57, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64,
70, 72, 73, 74, 75
fyrds
command of 14–15, 16, 17, 40
mustering/use of 8–9, 10, 11, 22, 23, 26, 32,
35, 36, 37, 40, 45, 46, 52–53, (54), 55,
60, 64, 65, 66–67, (68)
Harald Bluetooth, king of Denmark 21, 45
Harald Hard-Counsel, king of Norway 6, 57,
59, 59, 60, 72, 76
in battle 26, 28, 59, 60–61, 64, 65, 66–67,
(68), 69, 72, 73
alliance with Tostig 57, 59, 60, 64
death 19, 38, 62, 69, 72
leadership qualities 59, 65, 72, 73
invasion of England 14, 27, 57, 59, 60, 64,
72, 73
claim to English throne 27, 56, 57
Harold I Harefoot, king of England 56
Harold II Godwinsson, king of England 14,
56, 57, 58, 60, 60, 64, 72
as military leader/tactician 22, 27, 28, 58,
61, 62, 63, 64–65, 69, 74, 75, 76
mustering of English fleet 58, 60
mustering of Wessex *fyrd* 60
and Norman invasion 27–28, 57, 60,
74, 75–76
'making peace' with Vikings 62
Harthacnut, king of Denmark/England 56, 57
Hastings, battle of 54, 57, 69, 74, 75, 75, 78
helmets 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 18, 24, 28,
52–53, (54), 66–67, (68), 71
Holderness, fighting near 60, 62, 63
Ipswich, sacking of 27, 36, 47, 51
Ireland, raids on 5, 42, 58
jarls, role in battle 19, 32, 34, 37, 38, 39,
72–73
kings (Viking), role in battle 32, 34, 37, 38, 39,
40, 72–73
Lindisfarne (Holy Island), raid on 4, 5
Lindsey, fighting at 59, 62, 63
lithsmen 18
London, Viking threat to 27, 40, 46
Magnus Barelegs, king of Norway 59, 72, 76
Magnus Olafsson, king of Norway 57
Maldon, battle of 10, 11, 15, 18, 26, 42–45, 46,
48–51, 49, 52–53, (54), 54–55, 55, 65, 70, 73
composition of forces 15, 19, 22, 25, 27,
29, 31, 45, 46, 47, 48–51, 52–53, (54),
54–55, 55, 72
nature of fighting 15, 19, 22, 25, 27, 29,
31, 45, 46, 47, 48–51, 52, 52–53, (54),
54, 55, 72
Maldon, sacking of 27, 46, 51, 55
Mercia, kingdom of 6, 8, 26, 30, 32, 33, 40,
42, 64, 74
Meretun (Marten), fighting at 29, 34, 35, 40
Morcar, earl of Northumbria 27, 57, 58, 59,
60, 62, 72
Norman invasion 9, 22, 27, 72, 74
Northumbria, kingdom of 5, 6, 7, 26, 30, 42,
57, 58, 64, 72, 74
Olaf Tryggvasson (Olaf III the Peaceful) 59,
62, 72, 76

Orkney, earldom/earls of 59, 60, 62, 64, 70, 76
Orri, Eystein 62, 70
Reading (camp), fighting at 25, 31, 32–33, 34,
36, 37, 40, 73
Sandwich, sacking of 27, 46, 47, 51, 58, 60
Scotland, raids on 5, 60, 62, 76
seax 12, 15, 28, 52–53, (54), 65
shield bosses 21, 22, 23
shield-wall formation, use of 15, 26, 28, 29,
29, 37–38, 39, 46, 51, 52–53, (54), 54, 55,
62, 66–67, (68), 69, 71, 74
shields 10, 12, 13, 21, 22, 22, 23, 28, 28, 29,
29, 66–67, (68)
spearheads 16, 17, 26, 26
spears 6, 16, 17, 24, 26, 28, 50, 51, 52–53,
(54), 63, 66–67, (68), 75
Stamford Bridge, battle of 15, 22, 27, 28, 49,
56–61, 62, 63, 64–65, 66–67, (68), 69–70,
71, 72, 74, 75–76, 78
composition of forces 14, 18, 19, 22, 25, 27,
61, 62, 63, 64–65, 66–67, (68)
nature of fighting 27–28, 29, 62, 65, 69–70,
72, 73, 76
Svein Estrithsson, king of Denmark 57, 76
Svein Forkbeard, king of the Danes 11, 19,
31, 45, 56
sword-hilt fittings 16, 17, 65, 65, 69, 73
swords 5, 13, 16, 17, 23, 28, 29, 37, 39, 51,
65, 65, 69, 73, 75
thegns, role in battle 15, 16, 17, 52–53,
(54), 54
Tostig (earl of Northumbria) 19, 27, 57,
58–59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 69, 72
Viking army (*micel here*) 18, 21, 25, 28, 61
campaign strategies 5–6, 7, 26, 27, 73, 74
bases/logistical support 6, 7, 45, 73, 74
over-wintering/winter-camps 6, 7, 20, 20,
24–25, 26, 27, 30–31, 79
raiding parties 6, 7, 25, 26–27, 30, 31,
32, 34, 35, 36, 37, 43, 46, 47, 51, 58,
59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 73, 74, 79
composition/elements of 11, 14, 19, 20, 24,
26, 31, 55, 64
command structures/military leaders
19–21
drengir ('fellowship') of warriors 20–21
leiðangr (levying), use of 11, 14, 64
lið (military force), role of 38, 45, 55
strategic/tactical mobility of 24–25, 27, 28,
31–32, 37, 51, 73
taking of *geld*/tribute 19, 26, 27, 31, 33, 40,
46, 48–49, 50, 55, 56, 58, 60, 62, 74
Viking fleet/ships 4, 5, 11, 11, 14, 19–21, 24,
25, 30, 31, 31, 45, 55, 57, 61, 61
in action 24, 25, 27, 31, 31, 32, 40, 44–45,
46, 48, 51, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64,
70, 73, 79
ships' crews (*félagi*) 11, 11, 14, 19–21, 25,
31, 45, 61
size of 19, 31, 60, 61
Waltheof, earl of Huntingdon 58, 60
Wessex, fighting in 8–9, 9, 26, 31, 32, 33, 34,
35, 40, 73, 74
West Saxon forces 8–9, 22, 23, 26
command/mustering of 30, 32–33
in action 30, 32–33, 34, 35, 36, 40
William II, Duke of Normandy 54, 56, 57, 60,
72, 74, 75, 76
Wilton, fighting at 32, 34, 35, 40
York, attack on 25, 27, 28, 59, 60, 62, 63, 73

Osprey Publishing
c/o Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
PO Box 883, Oxford, OX1 9PL, UK
Or
c/o Bloomsbury Publishing Inc.
1385 Broadway, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10018, USA
E-mail: info@ospreypublishing.com

www.ospreypublishing.com

OSPREY is a trademark of Osprey Publishing Ltd, a division of
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

First published in Great Britain in 2017

© 2017 Osprey Publishing Ltd

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be used or
reproduced in any form without the prior written permission, except
in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.
Enquiries should be addressed to the Publisher.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: PB: 978 1 4728 1832 4
ePub: 978 1 4728 1834 8
ePDF: 978 1 4728 1833 1
XML: 978 1 4728 2330 4

Index by Rob Munro
Typeset in Univers, Sabon and Adobe Garamond Pro
Maps and diagrams by bounford.com
Page layouts by PDQ Digital Media Solutions, Bungay, UK

Osprey Publishing supports the Woodland Trust, the UK's leading
woodland conservation charity. Between 2014 and 2018 our donations
are being spent on their Centenary Woods project in the UK.

To find out more about our authors and books visit
www.ospreypublishing.com. Here you will find extracts, author
interviews, details of forthcoming events and the option to sign up for
our newsletter.

Artist's note

Readers may care to note that the original paintings from which the
colour plates in this book were prepared are available for private sale.
All reproduction copyright whatsoever is retained by the Publishers. All
enquiries should be addressed to:

Peter Dennis, 'Fieldhead', The Park, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire NG18
2AT, UK, or email magic.h@ntlworld.com

The Publishers regret that they can enter into no correspondence upon
this matter.